

ANDREWS THAZHATH

THE LAW OF THOMAS

OIRSI, KOTTAYAM

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THE LAW OF THOMAS

DR. ANDREWS THAZHATH

THE LAW OF THOMAS



ORIENTAL INSTITUTE OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES, INDIA
VADAVATHOOR, KOTTAYAM - 686 010

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Nihil Obstat

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To My Parents

PREFACE

The present study entitled *The Law of Thomas* is the first chapter of my doctoral dissertation, *The Juridical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church (A Historic-Juridical Study)* at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, reprinted with minor variations. The dissertation is an earnest attempt to collect and arrange chronologically all the important sources of the Syro-Malabar Church and thus to fill the long-felt *lacuna* in the series of *Fontes* published by the erstwhile Roman Pontifical Commission for the codification of the Oriental Canon Law. After the defence of my doctoral dissertation, for which I received the grade *Summa cum laude*, I revised the text before its publication in the light of the suggestions and the subsequent approval of my professors. I revised and developed the theme "The Law of Thomas" with the purpose of identifying and spelling out the particular law proper to the early phase of the chequered history of the Syro-Malabar Church. The present work is the outcome of this attempt.

For the making up of this study I am indebted to many without whose constant support and encouragement, it would not have been possible. My thanks are due in a special way to Mar Joseph Kundukulam, Bishop of Trichur, to the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches, Rome, to all my professors especially Fr. Jan Rezác S. J., Fr. George Nedungatt S. J. and Fr. Placid Podipara C.M.I., to Fr. Xavier Koodapuzha, Director of the Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India Publications, Kottayam, and to the Manager and Staff of the St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam. I am very grateful to Fr. Joseph Koikakudy, Rector of the St. Thomas Ap. Seminary, Kottayam, for being kind enough to grace this book with a very good introduction. There are many others in India and abroad who have helped me in one way or other. I sincerely thank all of them.

Catholic Bishop's House,
Trichur 680 005, Kerala, India.
Epiphany, 6 January 1987.

Fr. Andrews Thazhath

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GENERAL ABBREVIATIONS

AAS	=	<i>Acta Apostolicae Sedis</i>
DTC	=	<i>Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique</i> , Paris, 1930 sq.
f, ff	=	folio, folios
ICHR	=	<i>Indian Church History Review</i>
NCE	=	<i>New Catholic Encyclopedia</i> , New York, 1967
OCA	=	<i>Orientalia Christiana Analecta</i> , Rome
OCP	=	<i>Orientalia Christiana Periodica</i> , Rome
p, pp	=	page, pages
PG	=	MIGNE, <i>Patrologia Graeca</i>
PIOS	=	Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, Rome
PL	=	MIGNE, <i>Patrologia Latina</i>
PUG	=	Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, Rome
PUL	=	Pontificia Universitas Lateranensis, Rome
PUU	=	Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Rome
sq	=	sequitur
STCE	=	MENACHERRY (ed), <i>St. Thomas Christian Encyclopaedia</i>

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INTRODUCTION

The ancient community of the St. Thomas Christians trace their origin to the Apostle Thomas and are proud of their apostolic origin. They are a community "Christian in faith, Indian (Hindu) in culture and oriental in worship". This community which formed an autonomous and individual church had always its own laws and traditions and customs which controlled and regulated their social and religious life. As far as their culture was concerned, their traditions were thoroughly Indian, but when worship was in question, they were oriental and East Syrian. They shared the faith and liturgy with the Persian Church, both being Churches of St. Thomas. Syriac was their liturgical language, and the Anaphora of Addai and Mari was used by them. They had also great devotion to the Cross and the Bible, the *psitha* being the version they used.

Although they had their own laws and customs, for various reasons, their particular laws and canonical sources of these laws have not yet been compiled. During the codification of Oriental Canon Law under Pius XI, the juridical sources of the Syro-Malankara Church were compiled by Father Placid CMI of venerable memory. The Syro-Malabar Church did not have that fortune. The need for the compilation was urgent. This lacuna has now been remedied by the work of Father Andrews Thazhath, the author of this work through his doctoral dissertation, "The Juridical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church". The Law of Thomas is the first chapter of the doctoral dissertation. It gives a comprehensive view of the sources of Canon Law.

In fact, Father Placid had already prepared the manuscript of the "Canonical Sources" and "The Canonical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church" has been posthumously published by the Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, recently. It is a good starter and attends mainly to the history of the sources.

The St. Thomas Christians were called the followers of the "Thoma Margam". The way of Thomas as opposed to the Way

of Peter, followed by the Latin Church. The Thoma Margam consisted of the sum-total of the religious discipline of the St. Thomas Christians" (p. 10). The laws that regulated the life of the St. Thomas Christians could be said to be distributed in the oral traditions, songs and plates of inscription (p. 17). Almost all the available sources were destroyed or burnt by the Portuguese at the Synod of Diamper in 1599. However, "it is to the glory of this Church that it has not ever been severed from the communion with the Church of Rome, in a continuity that the enormous geographic distance has never been able to break" (John Paul II).

In the ecclesiastical administration, their metropolitan was designated as the "Gate and Metropolitan of all India", thus indicating the jurisdictional power he wielded. In concrete, the archdeacon was the head of the Thomas Christian community. The bishops who were generally Chaldeans attended to spiritual matters, the social and religious life being under the archdeacon who was known as *Jāthikkukarthavyan* – responsible for the community (p. 25). He was the president of the *palliyōgam* for the whole Church. There were the parish and regional *palliyōgams*. The heads of families were members of the *yōgam*. This indicates the active interest the faithful took in the life of the Church. The *yōgam* gave the *Dēśakkuri*, ie. the *nihil obstat*, for the ordination of clerics, inflicted punishments etc.

Candidates to the priesthood studied under elderly priests known as Malpans. Priests were generally married, they wore loose pants and long shirts and grew beard. They used the East Syrian liturgy and gloried in it. The church architecture was similar to that of the Buddhist viharas, but it was in the pattern of the Chaldean Church with *hykla*, *kestroma* and *Madbaha* (p. 46). The obligation to recite the divine office was considered grave; its violation however was not classified as "mortal".

The *Makkathāya* or hereditary law for the sons was followed and daughters were given dowry. The dowry was handed over on the day of engagement. 10% of the dowry was for the parish. There were special rites at the birth of a child, when it was first fed with rice, when it learned the first letters of the alphabet etc., which were almost the same as those of the high caste Hindus. There were also special usages at marriage for the

birde and the bridegroom. These customs were christianised as in the case of *lāli*, *mantrakōṭi* etc (p. 55-57).

Particular customs were observed when a person was seriously sick, at death, in the observance of *pula*, *cāllam* etc (p. 58).

Father Thazhath has done a very creditable work in taking great pains to formulate the canonical sources of the St. Thomas Christians and to corroborate his contentions and conclusions with documentary evidence. The book is happily rich in documentation and references which make it really precious. The reference to the letters of Popes John XXII and Eugene IV to the Christians of India in the pre-Portuguese period clearly indicate how the Church of the Thomas Christians was Catholic. Father Thazhath seems to doubt that before the advent of the Chaldean emigrants there could have been an Indian liturgy. But this is only a supposition and every documentary evidence we have attests to the contrary.

The author is matter of fact, clear. No wonder, he has scored the highest grade for his dissertation. The Law of Thomas, the first chapter, is no exception. He deserves the gratitude of the whole Syro-Malabar Church for the magnificent work he has done. I congratulate him whole heartedly and wish the book large readership. It is a big help to every student not only of the Canonical sources of the Syro-Malabar Church, but also to everyone interested in its identity and individuality.

The Law of Thomas

The Second Vatican Council has thrown much light on the nature of individual Churches. It has urged every Christian to understand and keep up the identity of the individual Church to which he belongs in communion with the Universal Church. The decree on the Catholic Eastern Churches, no. 3, has clearly pointed out the constitutive factors of individuality under the title "rite" We read:

"These individual Churches, both Eastern and Western, while they differ somewhat among themselves in what is called "rite", namely, in liturgy, in ecclesiastical discipline and in spiritual tradition, are none the less all equally entrusted to the pastoral guidance of the Roman Pontiff, who by God's appointment is successor to Blessed Peter in primacy over the Universal Church".

In order to understand the factors of individuality as envisaged by the Council, namely *liturgy*, *ecclesiastical discipline* and *spiritual tradition*, one has to go into the sources and has to find out the general features in its historical evolution.

The present work entitled "The Law of Thomas" is an attempt to understand the individuality of the Syro-Malabar Church from the point of view of ecclesiastical discipline. It aims at an investigation of the pristine basis to which successive layers have been added in the evolution of the juridical patrimony of this Church. After giving a brief introduction to the history of this Church, a short survey of its particular law — the Law of Thomas — scattered in customs, traditions and a few documents is given. This study

is centered on the first 16 centuries, that is to say, to the period before the introduction of Latin laws among the Indian Christians. In the course of this work, mention will be also made of a few local practices, which have a more cultural and historical bearing than juridical, so that the reader may easily understand the circumstances under which the Law of Thomas was framed.

I. The Background

1. The Syro-Malabar Church

The Syro-Malabar Church¹ is that Apostolic, Indian, Oriental, Catholic Church which, according to strong and living tradition, was founded by the Apostle Thomas. Down to the centuries this Church has been called 'The Church of St. Thomas' and the Christians, 'The Thomas Christians'². From very ancient

¹ The term 'Syro-Malabar Church' came into general use only by the middle of the nineteenth century, when it was used to distinguish the community of the Thomas Christians subject to the prelates of the Latin jurisdiction in Malabar from the 'Syro-Chaldeans', the followers of Roccas and Mellus (Cf. GIAMIL *Genuinae Relationes*, p. 626; PODIPARA, *Hierarchy*, p. 15; For details, see below, Chapter five. The use of the term 'Syro-Malabar Church' is seen for the first time in the writings of the missionaries in 1788 (APF, *SOCG*, vol. 878, f. 104). When the Catholic Thomas Christians were separated from the Latins by the establishment of their own Apostolic Vicariates in 1887 and a Hierarchy was erected for them in 1923, their Church and Hierarchy were called 'The Syro-Malabar Church', and the 'Syro-Malabar Hierarchy' respectively (For details, see below, Chapters five and six). The word 'Syro' referred to the liturgical language Syriac (East Syriac). Malabar is a region located on the South-West coast of India, corresponding in great part to the modern federal state of Kerala. *Malankara* and *Malanadu* are also used with the same geographical significance. The Portuguese called this region the *Serra*.

² Bishop Francis Ros, the first Latin prelate over the Thomas Christians, after studying ancient books and traditions, writes in the beginning of the seventeenth century that the Church in India was always called 'The Church of St. Thomas, (Cf. ARSI, *Goa-Mal*, vol. 32, f. 530v; vol. 65, ff. 3-12, 43v-44; *British Museum*, Add. Ms. 9853, ff. 86-99v; ASSEMANI, *BO*, III, 2, pp. 413, 435 sq). Bishop Ros writes again that this Church at one time extended from the river Indus to the Cape of Comorine: ARSI, *Goa-Mal*, vol. 65, f. 45.

There are different Churches in the East which look to the Apostle Thomas as to their direct or indirect Apostle and founder. The Church of Persia Proper (Fars or Rew-Ardasir, today Iran) has made such a claim

times it began to share liturgy, prelates and some discipline with the Chaldean Church³. After the sixteenth century, it came under the Latin jurisdiction. In the twentieth century, after the establishment of an indigenous Hierarchy, it is now heading towards a proper juridical identity.

2. The Apostolicity and Catholic Orthodoxy

“The problems of the origins of the Syrian Christianity in India”, writes Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, “is closely connected with the evangelisation of India by the Apostle St. Thomas. This apostolate is asserted by ancient traditions both literary and local”⁴. According to Paulinus, “the belief that St. Thomas was killed and buried in India (at Mylapore) is as strong as the belief of the Europeans that Peter was killed and buried in Rome”⁵. Scholars today generally accept as reliable the tradition about the apostolate of St. Thomas in India, more precisely in Malabar and on the Coromandal coast, and about his martyrdom

(Cf. RAULIN, *Historia Malabaricae*, p. 433). The Churches in Edessa and Seleucia-Ctesiphon have claimed foundation through the disciples of Thomas (Cf. PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 37).

More frequently, however, the Christians of India were called ‘The Christians of St. Thomas’ or ‘The Thomas Christians’. But because of geographical and historical reasons, especially their relationship with the Chaldean Church, they were called differently: *Nasrani Mappilas* (Noble Christians), Soriani (Syrians), Syrian Christians, Chaldeans, Indo-Chaldeans, Indian Syrians, Malabarians, Syro-Malabarians, Syro-Chaldeans, Chaldeo-Malabarians, Malabar Syrians, Romo-Syrians, etc. In the present work, the term ‘The Thomas Christians’ is generally used; but the other terms, especially ‘The Syro-Malabarians’, are also used for the sake of specification.

³ By the term ‘Chaldean Church’ we mean the East-Syrian Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which includes the Church of Persia Proper also. The term ‘Chaldean’ was bestowed on the East-Syrian Catholic community by Pope Julius III, who in 1553 received Patriarch John Sulaqa (1551-1555) into hierarchical communion (Cf. GIAMIL, *Genuinae Relationes*, p. 479; For details, cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 475-488). In history this Church is known by various names, such as: The Church of the East, the Assyrian Church, the Babylonian Church, the Seleucian (Seleucia-Ctesiphon) Church, the Persian Church, the Mesopotamian Church, the Nestorian Church and sometimes falsely the Armenian Church. Some of these names were also used by the Thomas Christians. Cf. PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 37.

⁴ TISSERANT, *Eastern Christianity* p. 2.

⁵ PAULINUS, *Viaggio* p. 60.

at Mylapore⁶. Tradition holds that the Apostle Thomas ordained bishops and priests for the Christian communities he had founded⁷. The history and vicissitudes of this Church are closely linked with those of the East Syrian (Chaldean) Church. About the Catholic orthodoxy of this Church, Pope John Paul II said recently:

“It is to the glory of this Church (Syro-Malabar Church) that it has not ever been severed from the communion with the Church of Rome, in a continuity that the enormous geographic distance has never been able to break”⁸.

⁶ It is not within the scope of this study to establish the tradition about the Apostolate of St. Thomas in India. We accept the conclusions mainly of the following works: TISSERANT, *Eastern Christianity*, the first chapter; ID., “Syro-Malabar”, in *DTC*, XIV, col. 3089–3093; ID., “Nestorienne”, in *DTC*, XI, col. 161; A. E. MEDLYCOTT, *India and the Apostle Thomas*, London, 1905; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, pp. 15–35; ID., *CCO, Fonti*, II, VIII (Syro-Malankara), pp. 13–14; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*; GIAMIL, *Genuinae Relationes*; PANJIKARAN, *The Syrian Church in Malabar*, pp. 3–12. A PERUMALIL, *The Apostles in India*, Patna, 1971; etc.

J. ARAKKAL, M. V. CYRIAC and A. KOOTHOTTIL, in their article, “Alienation or Liberation? Towards an Evaluation of the History of Christianity in India”, (in *Jeevadhara*, Jan.–Feb. 1977, Alleppy, n. 37, pp. 17–85) have put forward some doubts on the reliability of the documents concerned with this tradition.

⁷ According to *Ramban Pattu*, the Apostle Thomas ordained two bishops by name Kepha (Peter) and Paul for Malabar and Coromandal coast Christians respectively. Cf. F. X. ROCCA, “La leggenda di S. Tommaso Apostolo”, in *OCP*, 32 (1933), Romae, pp. 168–179; BERNARD, *The St. Thomas Christians*, I, the first three chapters; MCKENZIE, *Christianity in Travancore*, p. 4; PODIPARA, *Hierarchy*, p. 24.

⁸ “E gloria di quella Chiesa di non essere stata mai tagliata fuori dalla comunione con la Chiesa di Roma, in una continuità che l’enorme distanza geografica non ha mai potuto incrinare”: Pope John Paul II during the *Angelus Domini* on 31 August 1980: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, III/2, Roma, 1980, p. 513. Although the Thomas Christians received their prelates from the Chaldean Church, which is said to have received Nestorianism in the fifth century, their Catholic orthodoxy is recognised by most in recent times. Pope Pius XII in a radio message on 31 December 1952 said:

“Nineteen hundred years have passed since the Apostle came to India. ... During the centuries that India was cut off from the West and despite many trying vicissitudes, the Christian communities formed by the Apostle conserved intact the legacy he left them, and as soon as the sea-passage – at the close of the 15th century – offered a link with

3. The Anthropological Factor⁹

The majority of the Thomas Christians are from the Indo-Dravidian stock. From the very beginning their community had some Jewish and Persian influence, and it got the cosmopolitan background of Malabar due to commercial relations. The Aryan influence got consolidated only at a later stage.

Among the Thomas Christians there are two distinct ethnical groups. The first group is called 'Northists' (*Vaṭakkumbhāgar*), and they claim to be the descendants of those converted by the Apostle Thomas mainly from the high caste local people

their fellow christians of the West, their union with them was spontaneous": AAS, XLV (1953), pp. 96-97; *Discorsi e Radio-messaggi di Sua Santità Pio XII*, XIV (1952-53) Vatican, p. 441.

Although the Thomas Christians were called Nestorians by some Western writers, the statement of Pope Pius XII is based on many historical facts and on the writings of the early European missionaries. In the year 1348 John Maringnoli, the Papal legate to the Khan of Cathay, during his stay at Columbam (Quilon in Malabar), was received with due honour by the Thomas Christians without any inhibition. Cf. G GOLUBOVICH, *Bibliotheca Bibliographica della Terra Sancta*, IV, Quarachy, 1923, pp. 274, 279, cited in PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 107, notes 18, 19. For the Thomas Christians there was no difficulty to have *Communicatio in Sacris* with the Portuguese and *Vice Versa*. Their Catholic orthodoxy is certified by many early missionaries: Cf. WICKI, *Documenta Indica*, III, pp. 806-810; IV, pp. 40 sq; V, pp. 416 sq.; SILVA REGO, *Documentacao*, VI, pp. 247 sq. The letter of Fr Dionysio S. J., Rector of the College of Cochin, dated 4 January 1570 clearly points out this fact: (*Torre de Tombe*, Lisboa, Jesuitas Armao, Lib. n. 28 sq, ff. 34-38, cited in THALIATH, *Synod of Diamper*, p. 13 note 29; Francis Ros, in his work "De erroribus Nestorianorum qui in hac India Orientali versantur", (Ed. by HAUSHERR, in *OCA* XI, (1928), 1, p. 15) says that, "although they (The Thomas Christians) professed Roman Catholic faith their books contained errors of Diodore, Theodore and Nestorius". Ros seems to be making here a clear distinction between the faith they professed and the books they possessed. See also, PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, pp. 101-115; KODAPUZHA, *Faith and Communion*; PANJIKKARAN, *The Syrian Church in Malabar*, pp. 27-49; GEORGE CATHANAR, *The Orthodoxy of the St. Thomas Christians*, Kottayam, 1904. THEKKEDATH, *History of Christianity in India*, II, pp. 28-33.

⁹ For details, Cfr. ANANTHAKRISHNA AYYER, *The Antropology of of the Syrian Christians*, Ernakulam, 1926; KRISHNA IYYER K. V., *A History of Kerala*, Palghat, 1965; NILAKANTA SASTRI K. A., *A History of South India*, Madras, 1966; N. K. JOSE, "The Forefathers of the Thomas Christians" pp. 1-30.

as well as from the Jewish community of India¹⁰. The other ethnical group called 'Southists' (*Tekkumbhāgar*) trace their origin back to the arrival in Malabar of a Syrian merchant by name Thomas Cana leading a group of Persian Christian emigrants in the fourth century¹¹. Today, both among the Northists and the Southists there are Catholics and non-Catholics¹². Among the Catholics there are two Churches: the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara Churches¹³.

4. The Chaldean Connections ¹⁴

There can be no exposition on the history and discipline of the Thomas Christian community without a reference to its relations with the Chaldean Church. The East Syrian or Chaldean Church had its origin from that Church or those Churches which grew east of the frontiers of the Roman Empire around the twin cities of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, situated on either side of the river Tigris. There is a tradition that the Apostle Thomas sent Addai, one of the 72 disciples of Jesus, to Edessa and that Addai's disciple Mari founded the Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

It is generally believed that during the first centuries the East Syrian Church had some kind of relationship with the Church of Antioch. During the first half of the fourth century, Pāpā bar Aggai, known to history as the first Catholicos of the Chaldean Church, held a synod of the prelates of the Persian Empire at Seleucia with the idea of organising this Church and strengthening his own position as its head and primate. Gradually the East Syrian Church centered at Seleucia grew as the

¹⁰ Cf. CCO, *Fonti*, II, VIII (Syro-Malankara), p. 14.

¹¹ Cf. KURMANKAN, *The Southists and Northists* (Malayalam), Alleppy, 1944.

¹² The Non-Catholic Thomas Christians are mainly: (i) The Jacobites or the Syrian Orthodox Christians divided at present into two rival groups, (ii) The Anjoorians, (iii) The Anglicans (CMS), (iv) The Marthomites, (v) The Mellusians or Nestorians, (vi) The St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India. Cf. PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, pp. 216-229.

¹³ The Syro-Malankara Church is that part of the community of the Thomas Christians which in the 17th century seceded from the authority of the Latin hierarchs and later accepted the Jacobite Communion, but which reunited with the Catholic Church in 1930 forming a particular Church. Cf. CYRIL MALANCHARUVIL, *The Syro-Malankara Church*, Ernakulam, 1974.

¹⁴ For details, Cf. THAZHATH, *The Juridical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church*, chapter two.

'National Church of the Persian Empire'. Caught in the meshes of the religious polemics that existed at that time, this Church did not receive the Council of Ephesus (431). Later it began to follow the Christology of Nestorius, Theodore and Diodore revering them as its own Fathers. In 1553, when Mar John Sūlāqā was installed patriarch by Pope Julius III, the Catholic line of Chaldean Patriarchate began.

From very ancient times the Syro-Malabar Church had relations with the Chaldean Church, especially with the Church of Persia Proper or Rew-Ardasir (today in Iran) which gloried in its foundation by the Apostle Thomas. Tradition is very strong in Malabar about the arrival in the year 345 A. D. of a certain Syrian merchant by the name of Thomas Cana, accompanied by one bishop, some clergy and faithful, who colonised some parts of Malabar. After Cosmos Indicopleustes (520-525), who speaks of the Christians in India, a certain Periodeutus by name Bodh seems to have visited India as the delegate of the Chaldean Patriarch Ezechiel (557-581). A clear relationship is deduced by many from a letter of the Chaldean Patriarch Iso'yahb III (ca. 650-660) to the bishop of Rew-Ardasir who had revolted against the patriarch. In the letter it is complained that sacerdotal succession is interrupted not only in India, but even in Persia Proper. The Malabar tradition hails the saintly activities of two Chaldean bishops by name Sāpōr and Prōt who are said to have come to Malabar in the eighth-ninth centuries. The Vatican Syriac codex XXII, written in 1301 at Cranganore, gives evidence of the existence of Chaldean bishops in India. We have clear documents about the names and dates of arrival of Chaldean Bishops in Malabar between 1490 and 1597.

Although the Thomas Christians had close relationship with the Chaldean Church, even hierarchical, it may be noted here that "the Church of the Thomas Christians was neither an integral part nor an output of the Church of Mesopotamia (Chaldean Church) and that the relations of the former with the latter were for practical, but not for doctrinal purposes"¹⁵ "Only in those matters in which the local usages and practices had no provision, they (the Thomas Christians) relied on the Seleucian laws".¹⁶

¹⁵ PODIPARA, 'Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship', in *STCE*, II, p. 109.

¹⁶ KOODAPUZHA, 'The History of the Church in Kerala in the Pre-Portuguese period', in *STCE*, II, p. 32.

II. The Law of Thomas: General Notions and Sources

1. Terminology

(i) *Tōma Mārga*: The term *mārga*, a modification of the Pali word *magga* has been always used among the Thomas Christians to denote their 'Christian way of life'¹⁷. It was originally a Buddhist term to mean "Buddhism as a way of life — the way to salvation or *nirvāṇa*"¹⁸. When Christianity was introduced to South India, where Buddhism and Jainism were then the prevalent religions, it was considered to be the new 'way' or *mārga*. Later the Aryans won superiority in the religio-cultural milieu at the expense of Buddhism and Jainism; but they made many adaptations from the local culture; the word *mārga* was sanskritised.¹⁹ Still the Thomas Christians continued to make use of this term to designate their religious way of life. The Hindus called them *Mārgakkār* (those who move in the *mārga*) and sometimes *Baudhay* (Buddhists) used in the sense of 'non-Hindus.'

¹⁷ Christianity as a 'Way' (*hodos*) is a biblical expression. Cf. Acts 9:2, 19:9, 23; 22:4, 24:14, 22. Cf. W. MICHAELIS, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, V, pp 42-114. Corresponding words are also seen among the Gnostics (*gnosis hodou*) and the Qumran community (*derek*) Cf. F. NOTSCHER, "Voies humaines et voies divines selon la Bible et Qumran". *La secte de Qumran et les origines du christianisme* (Communicationes aux IXes Journées bibliques) Louvain, 1959, pp. 135-148.

¹⁸ T. W. RHYS DAVIDS-W. STEDE, *Pali-English Dictionary*, (repr. Delhi, 1975) pp. 512f, gives the following meanings to the word "magga".

- 1) way, foot-path, high road (usually called *addhana magga*).
- 2) the road of moral and good living, the way to salvation, the way traced out by those who seek after *nirvana*.
- 3) the arya *atthanga* (*atthagika*) *magga*, "the noble eightfold path, involving right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right rapture. It is also called *arya magga* and *dharma magga*.
- 4) Buddhism as a way of life.
- 5) Buddhism as a religion. Cf. F. EDGERTON, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*, (Repr. Delhi, 1970,) p. 431.

The present author is indebted to Father Luke Ofm cap. (Trichur), India; for collecting the data about the word "*Magga*".

¹⁹ *Ibid*, *arya atthanga magga*.

The Christian way of life (*Kristu Mārga*) brought by the Apostle Thomas was called *Tōma Mārga*. It was planted in the Indian cultural religious milieu. The assistance of the Persian Christians helped its survival and growth. The *Tōma Mārga* was the sum total of the Christian life and heritage. The entrance into the Christian community was called *mārgam kūṭuka* (to share *mārga*). *Mārgappilla* (son of *mārga*) was used to denote a Christian. He was also called *Mārgavāsi* (one who dwells in the *mārga*) and *Mārgakkāran* (one who moves in the *mārga*, plural – *Mārgakkār*)²⁰. The *Mārgamkali* (*mārga* dance) and the *Mārgamkalipāṭṭu* (the ballads of *Mārgamkali*) expressed and explained the faith and traditions of the Thomas Christians.

The '*Tōma Mārga*', like the *Torah* for Jews, was the sum total of the religious discipline of the Thomas Christians. One who shares '*Tōma Mārga*' follows its discipline called the 'Law of Thomas' (*Tōmāyūṭe Niyamam*). These two terms, '*Tōma Mārga*' and *Tōmāyūṭe Niyamam*, were synonymously used by the Thomas Christians to denote their religious discipline.

(ii) *The Law of Thomas*: The Thomas Christians always cherished with pride the idea that they had the 'See of Thomas' and that their Church was governed by the 'Law of Thomas'.²¹ This idea grew stronger when they came into contact with the western Christian way of life (Latin customs and laws). By the term 'Law of Thomas' they meant the customs and laws (*consuetudines*) which they received through tradition since the time of their Apostle Thomas. They did not view this in opposition to the 'Law of Peter' — the law of the Latin Church or

²⁰ In recent times these words are often used to designate 'the newly converted' and had a bad connotation in the background of the caste system. When people of low castes were converted to Christianity, those of the high caste began to look upon them — the new converts — with contempt.

²¹ The terms 'Christians of St. Thomas', 'See of Thomas' and 'Law of Thomas' were commonly in use in Malabar, when the Portuguese came. The writings of the missionaries of this period are the best proofs for this. Many of these writings are brought to light by MUNDADAN, (*Traditions*; ID., *The Arrival*; THEVARMANNIL Abraham; KOLLAPRAMBIL, *Archdeacon*; PODI-PARA, *Thomas Christians*; etc. The *Documenta Indica* of J. WICKI; and the *Documentacao* of SILVA REGO (see Bibliography) reproduce many of the writings of this period. In all these works, the above mentioned three terms are met with *passim*.

the law of the Universal Church. At the same time they had the concept that each particular Church had its own laws. This consciousness of the people was very clear from the words of Mar Jacob, a Chaldean prelate, sent to the Malabar Church by the Chaldean Patriarch, who in a letter in 1523 to the king of Portugal asserted that he knew the laws and the Scriptures well with regard to baptism although he was not "instructed in the usage of the Pope and in the Roman usage".²² The Thomas Christians called the law of the Latins the 'Law of Peter' and their law the 'Law of Thomas'. Finding fault with this attitude, the biased Portuguese missionaries condemned such usage in the Synod of Diamper (1599)²³. Mar Abraham, the Chaldean Metropolitan of the Thomas Christians (+ 1597), had already made such distinction. Francis Ros, the first Latin bishop of the Thomas Christians, quotes Mar Abraham saying, "The Thomas Christians are acquainted with the Law of Thomas and it will be a dishonour for them to accept another law abandoning the law in which they have lived."²⁴

Sometimes the term 'Law of Thomas' is used in a restricted sense to mean the East Syrian Rite²⁵; but from the instances of its usage mentioned above, we understand that it was used in the Indian context and had a wider meaning. It was "the sum

²² SCHURHAMMER, *Malabar and Rome*, p. 16.

²³ The decree vii of the session III of the Synod of Diamper (1599) condemns this pluralistic attitude as heresy and schism (RAULIN, *Historia Malabarica*, p. 88; BPPA. I, p. 183; For an English translation of the decree: GEDDES, *The History of the Church of Malabar* pp. 142-143. It goes without saying that when the Thomas Christians said that they were not to be governed by the 'Law of Peter', what they meant was that, they were not to be governed by the law of the Latin Rite. But for the Portuguese the latter was the Law of Christ and hence the law of the Universal Church. The Thomas Christians never took a stand against the Roman primacy.

²⁴ ARSI, *Goa-Mal.*, vol. 32, f. 531v. On 30 September 1594 Francis Ros wrote to Rome a treatise on the affairs of Malabar, which contain the said idea; ARSI, *Goa-Mal.*, vol. 32, ff. 529-532 is a Portuguese copy of it; *Ibid*, ff. 525-527 is a Spanish copy of the same.

Cf. also, ARSI, *Goa-Mal.*, vol. 14, ff. 165-167: Letter of Fr. Abraham de George S. J., to Jesuit General Aquaviva on 15 December 1593 against Mar Abraham; *Ibid.*, f. 165, n. 3, 4 is a clear statement of the said idea.

²⁵ KOODAPUZHA, *Indian Church History*, p. 13; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians* pp. 111 and 117 note 26.

total of the ancient traditions of the Thomas Christians – the sum total of their Christian heritage”.²⁶ Father Podipara enlarges the concept of the Law of Thomas in the following words:

“The Individuality of the Malabar Church as expressed in its autonomy ..., the East Syriac Liturgy, the christianised Hindu customs, etc., were all the *Law of Thomas* for the Malabarians. This *Law of Thomas* made the Malabar Church fully at home in the Indian soil both from the religious and the cultural points of view”²⁷.

iii) *Definition*: By the term ‘Law of Thomas’ we mean the customs, privileges and the liturgical and disciplinary norms of the Indian Christians of St. Thomas, conveyed through tradition since the time of their Apostle Thomas. These as *consuetudines* had received legal force in the community. Although mostly unwritten, they can be compared to the *Nomocanons* of the East Syrians (Chaldeans) and of the West Syrians (Jacobites)²⁸.

2. Biblical Foundations :

The Law of Thomas, as a Christian discipline, is founded on Christ and His teaching (*Kristu Mārga* = Christ the Way). The Christian ‘Way’ (*hodos*) is clearly expressed in the following passages of the Acts of the Apostles : Acts. 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22. In order to find out the special features of the Law of Thomas, an attempt is made here to interpret freely and briefly the biblical passages, where mention is made about St. Thomas, the Apostle of Christ²⁹.

²⁶ KOODAPUZHA, “The Faith and Communion of the Thomas Christians”, in *STCE*, II, p. 28.

²⁷ PODIPARA, *The Individuality of the Malabar Church* (no date and place), p. 3.

²⁸ Cf. MAI, *SVNC*, t. x. pars prima (Nomocanon of Ebed Jesus), pars secunda (Nomocanon of Bar Hebraeus), Romae, 1838.

²⁹ For theological interpretations, Cf. ZALESKI, “Apostle Thomas in the Gospel”, in *The Apostle Thomas in India*, 1912, pp. 12–20; VELLANIKAL, “Faith and Character of St. Thomas”, in *STCE*, II, p. 2; F. A. D. CRUZ: K. S. G., *St. Thomas, The Apostle in India*, Second Edition, Madras, 1929, “The Bible Record”, pp. 11–19; KOODAPUZHA, “The *Toma Marga* in the Background of the Bible”, (Malayalam) in *Biblehashyam*, June, XIII (1984) 2, Kottayam, pp. 103–118.

(i) The first principle of the Law of Thomas is to become, like Thomas and the other Apostles, a disciple of Jesus Christ, the true *Guru* (teacher) and *Mārga* (Mt. 10:3, Mk. 3:18, Lk 6:15). (ii) Such a Christian or *Mārgakkāran* must be ready to say with St. Thomas: "Let us also go that we may die with Him" (Jn. 11:16). (iii) In the search after God, he has to help himself and others understand and recognise that "Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life", that 'He is the means to the Father – to the eternal salvation' (Jn. 14:2–6). (iv) The story of Thomas in Jn. 20:20–29 makes us understand that the truth of the risen Lord is a matter of experience and faith and not that of mere reasoning³⁰. Therefore the Christians, by experiencing the risen Lord through the means which Christ Himself has provided upto the end of the world (for example, the Gospels, the Sacraments), have to make the public profession of faith "My Lord, My God". (v) In communion with the College of Apostles under the leadership of Peter (Jn. 21:1–2, 15–18; Acts. 1:12–15) and their successors, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts. 2:1–12), the Christians have to go and preach the Gospel to every nation (Mk. 16:14–15). (vi) In fine, the Law of Thomas has to be an incarnation of the 'Law of Christ' in the socio-cultural environment of India, where St. Thomas showed the *Mārga*, which is Christ.

3. The Evolution of the Law of Thomas

The nature and features of the Law of Thomas depended much on the historical evolution of the Thomas Christian community.

As mentioned above, the law of Thomas had its origin in the Apostolic period. Buddhism, Jainism and the natural religions of the Dravidians were then the prevalent religions of South India. Occasional Aryan emigration had its own influence. Because of commercial contacts, Jewish and Persian influences were not

³⁰ Christ blamed the doubter Thomas for his extreme reasoning on matters of faith (Jn. 20: 27, 29); but Christ allowed him to see the wounds and to put his hands on His side. Such a personal experience of the risen Lord helped him to make the greatest profession of faith: "My Lord, My God". This experiential knowledge of God, which is possible today by the inner touch of Christ or the intuitive knowledge of Christ, suits well to the Indian mentality: the West gives more importance to reason, the East to experience.

little in Malabar. Hence we may suppose that the Law of Thomas, at its nascent stage had traits of this cosmopolitan culture – a mixture of Dravidic, Buddhist, Jainist, Jewish, Persian and Hindu influences. From history we know that the external features of this Apostolic Church, as elsewhere, were not static or stagnant; nor were they well defined. The Church adapted itself to the local circumstances. Hence the growth of different rites from the same faith-content of the apostolic preaching. The Law of Thomas, therefore, at the apostolic stage was Indian, which in itself was a mixture of different influences.

The Syrian colonisation, probably from the fourth century onwards, helped the survival and growth of the Christianity of South India. The commercial success of the Christians gave them a high position in the society. At this stage the Law of Thomas began to be enriched with some Persian Christian elements.

Historians generally are of the opinion that the Aryan-Hindu superiority and the system of four castes got established in Malabar only by the 8th-9th century. The Dravidian religions together with the persecuted Buddhism and Jainism slowly merged into Hinduism and disappeared from the scene. The Aryans on the other hand, while upholding the supremacy of the Hindu religion in Malabar, adapted much from the local culture and religions. It is probable that they adapted also from Christianity, which was greatly influential at that time³¹. During this gradual revolution, the Christians, who were experts in trade, agriculture and warfare managed to keep up their existence and prestige and to win high social status. To cope with the high caste Brahmins, they Christianised many customs of the high caste Hindus. They

³¹ Sri Sankara, the greatest reformer of Hinduism (VIII or IX C) hailed from Kalady, three miles east of Angamaly the ancient Syrian Christian stronghold in central Kerala. He was quite unconventional in his religious teachings and was excommunicated by the Nambudiri community of Brahmins to which he belonged. Of his contacts with Christianity we know nothing; but a bold versatile religious innovator like him could not have failed to take note of the doctrines and practices of the powerful community of the Thomas Christians, among whom he lived; they were by all accounts, integrated into the national life of Kerala by this time as the charters (Copper plate grants), granted to them by the kings of Kerala, still extant, clearly show. Cf. P. THOMAS: "Christian Influences on Hinduism Before the European Period", in *STCE*, II, pp. 177-179.

became safe and secure within the strong, four walls of caste system. On the basis of this cultural adaptation, some historians qualify the 'Thomas Christians as 'Hindu in culture'. The missionaries from the West who came in the 16th century found the Law of Thomas to be interwoven with many Hindu practices to such an extent that some of them wondered whether the Thomas Christians were not more Hindu than Christian!

Attributing superstitions and pagan elements, the western missionaries tried to make the Law of Thomas conform to the Law of the Latins (Law of Peter), causing drastic confusion and change in the discipline of the community. In the 20th century attempts are going on under the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy to revive the Law of Thomas according to the existential needs.

4. Western Sources and References

The compilation of the Law of Thomas has become an arduous task because of the lack of sources. What we possess today have come down to us mainly through oral traditions, folklore and some written documents. For much of the specific details we depend on the writings of the missionaries of the later period. To these, references are made in the coming chapters. The following sources and references, mainly western, provide us with some information about the customs and traditions of the Thomas Christians.

i) The Apocryphal work, *Acts of Thomas*, which speaks of the Apostolate of St. Thomas in India.³²

ii) The testimonies of Eusebius and St. Jerome³³ about the mission of Pantaenus to India in A.D. 190, especially to the Brahmins and to the philosophers of that people: Eusebius says

³² Cf. WILHELM SCHNEEMELCHER, *New Testament Apocrypha*, (Trans. by R. MCL, WILSON) Philadelphia; 1964, pp. 442-531; KLIJN, *The Acts of Thomas*, pp. 5-154; VELLIAN, "The Apostle Thomas; MEDLY-COTT, *India and the Apostle Thomas*, pp. 213-297, 1-17.

³³ EUSEBII HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA, Book V, 10, PG, 20 456; S. HIERONYMI, *De Viribus Illustribus*, 36, PL, 23, 683; Cf. JOSE, *Historical Problems* pp. 31-40; GEORGE APPASSERY, "The India of Pantaenus" (Malayalam), in *Kerala Caritrattilute*, Kerala History Congress, 1981, pp. 1-16.

that Pantaenus, sent by Demetrius, Bishop of Alexandria, saw among the Christians of India a copy of the Gospel of St. Mathew written in Hebrew (Aramaic).

iii) In the middle of the fourth century, Emperor Constantine is said to have sent to Malabar one Theophilus the Indian³⁴. According to the Aryan historian Philostorgius, quoted by Photius³⁵, Theophilus found the Christians of India hearing the reading of the Gospel in a sitting posture.

iv) The testimonies of the Fathers of the Church like St. Ephrem (306-373)³⁶, St. Gregory Nazianzen (324-390)³⁷, St. Ambrose (333-397)³⁸, St. Jerome (342-420 A.D.)³⁹, St. Gregory of Tours (VI C.)⁴⁰ and Isidore of Seville (VII C.)⁴¹. They speak about the apostolate of St. Thomas, about the Christians of India and about the priestly succession there.⁴²

v) Odericus Vitalis (before 1145 AD), after narrating the first part of the *Acts of Thomas*, says, "There is the See of the Apostle Thomas and the Catholic faith even unto this day".⁴³

³⁴ Cf. CCO, *Fonti*, II, VIII (Syro-Malankara), p. 36, notes 1 & 2 where PODIPARA quotes, "Philostorgi Eccles. Hist. Lib. III", in *Photium Bibliotheca*, Mss, v. 65, c. 486; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 104; T. K. JOSEPH, *Malabar Christians and their Ancient Documents*, p. 2.

³⁵ Cf. F. A. D'CRUZ KSG., *St. Thomas, the Apostle in India*, 2nd Ed., Madras, 1929, p. 151; MEDLYCOTT, *India and the Apostle Thomas*, p. 188.

³⁶ T. J. LAMY, *Sancti Ephraemi Syri Hymni et Sermones*, Melchonia, 1902 vol. IV, col. 693-708; St. EPHRAEM, *Carmina Nisibena.*, Ed. by BICKELL, Lipsia, pp. 701-704; MEDLYCOTT, "The Witness of St. Ephrem and Others", in *STCE*, II, pp. 18-22.

³⁷ GREGORY NAZIANZEN, *Contra Arianos ei de seipso, Oratio 23, 11*, PG, (MG), 36, 227; KOODAPUZHA, *Indian Church History*, p. 55.

³⁸ AMBROSE, *De Moribus Brachmanorum*, in PL, 17, 1167; ID., *In Psalmum enarratio*, 21, PL., 14, 1143.

³⁹ JEROME, *Epist. 125 Ad Rusticum Monachum*, 3, PL. 22, 1073-1074; ID., *Epist. 146, Ad Evangelium*, PL., 22, 1194; *Epist. 59. Ad Marcellam*, PL., 22, 589.

⁴⁰ GREGORY OF TOURS, *Miraculorum Liber*, 1, 32; PL., 71, 733.

⁴¹ ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *De Ortu et Obitu Patrum*, 74, 132; PL, 83, 152.

⁴² The work *Doctrine of the Apostles*, written in the third century by an unknown author, speaks about the priestly succession in India after Thomas: Cf. CURETON, *Ancient Syriac Documents*, Cf. also KOODAPUZHA *Indian Church History*, pp. 52-58.

⁴³ Cf. ZALESKI, *Saints in India*, p. 144. PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 77 note 33, p. 105.

The author of *Passio*, referring to Andropolis (India?) speaks about the "See of St. Thomas and the Catholic faith even unto this day".⁴⁴

vi) The Vatican Syriac codex XXII written in 1301 at Crangannore (in Kerala) : The colophon of this codex speaks about the See of St. Thomas in India and about the relationship of the Indian Church with the Chaldean Church.

vii) The confused report about the Thomas Christians by Jordanus Catalani (1302), whom Pope John XXII sent again to India in 1328 as Bishop of Columbam (Quilon in Malabar) : He did not reach India the second time.⁴⁵

viii) The report of John Maringnoli, Papal legate to the Khan of Cathay, who stayed at Columbam (Quilon) for sixteen months (ca. 1348) : The Thomas Christians received him as a brother in faith and the legate of the Pope with high honour and they paid for his expenses. He speaks of the Malabar Christians as proprietors of pepper.⁴⁶

ix) The testimony of Aloysius Cadamust (1493) : Cadamust testifies to the existence of Christians in Calicut (in Malabar), who at the time had great scarcity of priests to say Holy Mass; whose baptisms were administered in a river only once in a year.⁴⁷

x) Apostolic Constitutions and Letters : Until the 16th century the Thomas Christians could not have any direct communication with the Church of Rome. Still, there are two Apostolic letters directed to the Thomas Christians, namely, the Pontifical Bull of Pope John XXII dated 8 April 1330 to the chief of the Christians of Quilon and the letter of Pope Eugene IV in

⁴⁴ Cf. PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, pp. 105, 77.

⁴⁵ Cf. MACKENZIE, *Christianity in Travancore*, p. 8; TISSERANT, *Eastern Christianity* p. 21; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, pp. 105-106; PANJIKARAN, *Syrian Church in Malabar*, pp. 33-34.

⁴⁶ G. GOLUBOVICH, *Bibliographia Bibliografica della Terra Sancta*, IV, Quarachi, 1923, pp. 274-279; cited in PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, pp. 107-108; PANJIKARAN, *Syrian Church in Malabar* p. 34; SCHURHAMMER, *Malabar and Rome*, p. 25.

⁴⁷ Cf. RAULIN, *Historia Malabarica*, p. 385.

the year 1439 to the 'reigning prince of the Indian Christians'.⁴⁸ These two letters are indicative of some features of the Law of Thomas. The Apostolic constitutions and Letters to the Chaldean Patriarchs during the Pre-Latin period of the Indian Church of St. Thomas could be included in the juridical sources of the Syro-Malabar Church, the Indian Church of St. Thomas being under the jurisdiction of the former. Giamil has enumerated these documents.⁴⁹

5. Local Sources:

To know more about the Law of Thomas we have to depend on the local sources. To collect them is a tedious task, because they are dispersed in oral traditions, some songs, copper plate grants, and in some historical monuments and literary works. Brief notes on the important ones are given below:

i) *Oral Traditions*: In the past, customs, traditions and laws were conveyed to the generations mainly through oral communication. Some of these have come down to us. The writings of the visitors and missionaries from abroad shed more light on these in the past.⁵⁰ Besides, the works of Fathers Podipara, Mundadan, Bernard of St. Thomas and of many others can be referred to for the better understanding of these sources.⁵¹

ii) *The Songs*: There are some very ancient folk-songs which describe the life of the Apostle Thomas in India and which depict the customs and traditions of the Thomas Christians. Most of these songs are collected by P. U. Lukos in his work "*The Ancient Songs of the Syrian Christians*."⁵² The themes of

⁴⁸ Cf. PANJIKARAN, *Syrian Church in Malabar* p. 34; NAGAM AIYA, *Travancore State Manuel*, II, p. 147.

⁴⁹ GIAMIL, *Genuinae Relationes*, pp. 1-12; CCO, *Fonti*, II, VIII (Syro-Malankara), p. 34 note 3.

⁵⁰ About the writings of these missionaries I shall speak in the coming pages. We get much information from the following work: SLLVA REGO, *Documentacao*, XII, pp. 394-403.

⁵¹ Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 60-67; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*; BERNARD, *The St. Thomas Christians*, vol. I; *Kraistava vijnanakosam* (Mal.), Prakasam, Alleppy, 1975 and the *St. Thomas Christian Encyclopedia* (Ed by G. MENACHERY) are very informative in this field.

⁵² First edition, (Mal.) Kottayam, 1910, Fifth edition, (Mal.) Kottayam, 1980. CHUMMAR CHOONDAL has made a critical study of these songs in his work, *Christian Folk Songs*, Trichur, 1983; Cf. also, ID., *Kerala Folk Literature* Trichur, 1980.

historical, matrimonial, liturgical and biblical interest constitute the majority of them.⁵³ The ballads *Rambān Pāṭṭu*⁵⁴ and the *Mārgam Kali Pāṭṭu*⁵⁵ are among the best known. Many songs attached to important churches and to such occasions as wedding feasts are still preserved intact in Malabar, especially among the Southists.⁵⁶ Some of these songs like, *Viratiyān Pāṭṭu*, are performed by the Hindu caste of singers called *Pāṇans*.⁵⁷ The actual composition of these songs is of later period; but the idea goes back to a period long before.

iii) *Copper Plate Grants*: The Thomas Christians enjoyed many privileges from the local rulers. These privileges were engraved on copper plates.

a) *The Thomas Cana Plates*: They are sometimes known as 'The Mar Jacob's Plates'⁵⁸. It is generally believed that they

⁵³ CHUMMAR CHOONDAL classifies them as follows: (1) Folk songs (i) Ceremonial songs for marriage, funeral, etc.: eg. *Kallyana Pattu*, *Kannokku Pattu*; (ii) Pilgrim songs: eg. *Martoman Pattu*; (iii) Ammanai songs: eg. *Devamatha Ammanai*. (2) Ballads: (i) Accounts of Thomas traditions: eg. *Mārgam Kalipattu*, *Ramban Pattu*, *Viratiyan Pattu*; (ii) songs on the history of different churches: eg. *Pallipattu*; (iii) songs on biblical characters: Cf. ID., *Christian Folk Songs*, p. 33-34.

⁵⁴ Cf. H. HOSTEN, *The Song of Thomas Ramban*, Cochin, 1931; ROCCA, "La leggenda di S. Tommaso Apostolo", in *OCA*, 32 (1933), pp. 168-179.

This song is claimed to have been originally made by a disciple of St. Thomas. The text we actually possess is asserted to be a redaction of this original in modern language by Thomas Maliekal, the 48th priest in priestly succession in his family. The date of this redaction is differently given as 1061 or 1101 AD. Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 60 note 86; P. J. THOMAS, *Christians and Malayalam Literature*, pp. 61 sq.

⁵⁵ This is a description of the introduction of *Marga* or 'Way' (Christian Faith) into Malabar. This is composed to accompany some sacred dance, probably a Christian imitation of the *Yatrakkali* (Journey song) of the Malabar Brahmins. Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 60 note 87; P. J. THOMAS, op. cit. pp. 55 sq.

⁵⁶ Cf. P. J. THOMAS, *The Marriage Customs*.

⁵⁷ P. J. THOMAS, *Christian Literature of Kerala*, pp. 51-54

⁵⁸ This copper Plate was in the possession of Mar Jacob, the Metropolitan of the Thomas Christians in the XVI century, who pawned it to a Muslim because of his poverty. The Portuguese helped him to regain it and it was kept in the Portuguese factory at Cochin; but later it was lost. Francis Ros gives the translation of the text in *Relacao da Serra*, in *British Museum Add. Mss.*

were given by the king Xoran (Cēramān) Perumāl to Thomas Cana and the Christians. Here we quote Mundadan who gives an account of the privileges granted by this plate, as narrated by Francis Ros :

“He (the King) allowed Thomas Cana (and his successors) the use of seven kinds of musical instruments and many honours. They could speak as equals of the king and walk and ride like him. They could use the palanquin. At weddings their women were allowed to whistle with the finger in the mouth as do the women of the kings. The king conferred on Thomas of Cana the duty and privilege of spreading carpets on the ground, of using sandal-paste, erecting pandals, and riding elephants. Royal umbrellas were allowed him. And besides these, he granted for ever five taxes to Thomas and his posterity and to his associates, both men and women, and to all his relations and to the followers of his faith”⁵⁹.

The same Xoran Perumal is said to have given Thomas Cana and the Christians the land of Kodungallūr (Crangannore) with the permission to build a church and a city⁶⁰. Thomas Cana plates are dated by some authors to be of the fourth century, but many authors date it in the eighth century. So far nobody has definitively settled the issue.

b) The *Quilon Plates* or *Tārīṣa Plates*⁶¹ : They were given by Ayyam Aṭikal, the king of Vēṇāṭ. Of the two sets of Quilon

9853, ff. 87v sq. A Malayalam translation is given by JOSE N. K. *Tamrasas-anagal*, pp. 38 sq: for details, *Ibid.*, pp. 37-61, FERROLI, *Jesuits* I, pp. 79-81; PANJIKARAN, *Christianity in Malabar*, p. 100.

⁵⁹ Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 135; *British Museum*, Add., MS., 9853 ff. 87 sq.

⁶⁰ Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 95 sq.

⁶¹ There are two sets of Quilon Plates. The first set consists of three plates, of which the first one is now kept in the residence of the Marthomite Metropolitan, Tiruvalla. The second one is in the Old Syrian Christian (Jacobite) Seminary, Kottayam; and the third one is lost. The second set, which according to some experts is a later copy of the original, has four plates. The first plate is lost. The second and the third plates are in the Old Syrian Christian Seminary, Kottayam and the fourth plate is in the Marthomite Metropolitan residence Thiruvalla. For details, Cf. JOSE N. K., *Tamrasasangal*, pp. 9-23.

plates, the first set was given to the Tārīśa Church of Quilon, by which the Church was made custodian of the 'steelyard and weights' and of the *Kappam* (Stamps) with the power of collecting taxes, all of which previously belonged to the king of Vēṇāṭ. The Church was also given the judicial privilege of trying persons and was granted the service of some dependant caste people. The second set of Quilon Plates was given to the Quilon Church, to the Jews and to the 'Maṇigrāmam Christians'. These Christians called *Maṇigrāmakkār* are said to be the descendants of the Nair caste Christians once persecuted and made to apostatise by the powerful local leaders called *Maṇikkavācakakkār*⁶². These Plates specified 72 privileges. They were also called 'Tēvalacira Plates'⁶³. Francis Ros indicated that, by these plates the Thomas Christians of Quilon were allowed to collect the hundredth part of the duties on brockage and weights for the maintenance of their church in the town⁶⁴. There are different opinions about the date of these plates. For some they are of the third century; for others, of the ninth century (ca. 848); the latter seems to be more probable.

c) *The Iravikkōṟṭtan's Plate or the Vīrarāghava paṭṭayam* is another Copper Plate, by which Emperor Vīrarāghavan the Great gave special privileges to the Maṇigrāmam Christians⁶⁵.

d) There is also mention of the *Tāzhekātu Church Plate* which was given during the period 1023–1043 AD by the Emperor Rājasimhakulaśeghara to two businessmen, authorising them to start shops⁶⁶.

⁶² Cf. BROWN, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, pp. 76–78; Cf. also, *Travancore Archeological Series*, vol. VI, part, II, Trivandrum, 1927, pp. 180–181. SCHURHAMMER, *Malabar and Rome*, p. 23 note 69.

⁶³ *Tēvalacira* is a place near Quilon: Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 134, 131–132 note 62. NEDUMKUNNAM, *Kerala Christians*, pp. 145–156. KOODAPUZHA, *Indian Church History* pp. 135–139.

⁶⁴ *British Museum*, Add, Ms. 9853, f. 89 v; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 136.

⁶⁵ This plate is now kept in the Old Syrian Christian Palace 'Devalokam', Kottayam. NEDUMKUNNAM, *Kerala Christians*, pp. 137–141 and JOSE N. K., *Tamrasasanagal*, pp. 23–29, have edited and translated these works. K. M. Daniel gives the date 230 AD; T. K. Joseph, 1320 AD; Jose, N. K. the 13th century; Burnal, 744 AD; etc. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–37. NAGAM AIYA, *Travancore State Manuel*, II, p. 125.

⁶⁶ Cf. JOSE N. K., *Tamrasasangal*, pp. 2, 6–9; KOODAPUZHA, *Indian Church History*, pp. 125–126.

iv) *Church Inscriptions and Granite Crosses* : There are some church inscriptions which deal with the privileges of the Thomas Christians, such as, *Kumārimuṭṭam Inscriptions* (15th century) which speak about taxes accredited to the Kumārimuṭṭam Church for lighting of the oil lamp⁶⁷. Lighting an oil lamp in houses, churches and temples was a common practice among the Hindus and the Christians alike.

Crosses erected in front of and inside the Thomas Christian churches are monuments of historical and cultural interest. The so-called 'Persian Crosses' or 'St. Thomas Crosses' with some Pelhevi inscriptions found at Mylapore (St. Thomas Mount), Kottayam, Kadamattam and Alangad (the last three in Malabar) are indicative of the cult of the Cross among the Thomas Christians and of the Chaldean influence in Malabar⁶⁸. The majority of the scholars date the erection of these Crosses around the seventh century. It is interesting to note here that St. Thomas was often called *Kuriṣumuttappan* (= Saint of the Cross) by the Christians of Malabar. Other types of Crosses were also existing in Malabar.⁶⁹

v) *The Tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore*: The tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore is a living monument of the faith and history of the Thomas Christians. The elaborate study of Father Mundadan on this tomb and on the traditions connected with it, is very informative for any student of history.⁷⁰ Down to the centuries many travellers from abroad have testified to the

⁶⁷ Cf. *Travancore Archeological Series*, VI, 2, Trivandrum, 1927, pp. 176-181. There is another granite inscription at Mulamthuruthy (Malabar). This is indicative of the Chaldean influence in Malabar. Cf. *Kraistavavijnanakosam*, p. 530.

⁶⁸ Scholars are not unanimous about the contents of the inscriptions on the crosses. Cf. F. E. KEAY, *A History of the Syrian Church in India*, 2nd Ed., SPEK, Madras, 1957, p. 25; SCARIA ZACHARIA, *Rantu Kritikal*, p. xli-xlii; JAMES MENACHERRY, "Thomas Christian Architecture", in *STCE*, II, pp. 145-146, 139-140; *Kraistavavijnanakosam*, p. 530. The Cross at the St. Thomas Mount, Mylapore is also called 'the Bleeding Cross' and the 'Miraculous Cross'. Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 78-80.

⁶⁹ The Cross of the Cheppad Church is of the Ethiopian model. The silver Cross of the Niranam Church is different from the Persian Crosses. The Cross of Edappally is still different from the others. Cf. *Kraistavavijnanakosam*, p. 530.

⁷⁰ Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions* pp. 1-84.

existence and importance of this tomb and of the Christian community which venerated it. Connected with this tomb there were many customs among the Thomas Christians of Malabar: for example, pilgrimages to the tomb from Malabar with due preparation; making Holy Water with the earth taken from the tomb; the memorial feast of *Dukṛāna* on the day of martyrdom of the Apostle (July 3), etc.

vi) *Literature*: Whether a Malabar Christian literature existed in the past is a question. Some of the 'songs', mentioned above, had their origins in very ancient times; but they got written form only at a later stage⁷¹. The Syriac literature that existed in Malabar — for example, Vatican Syriac Codex no. 22 — is an evidence for the Chaldean influence in Malabar.

The Tamil *Sangham* works give glimpses of the cultural background for the origin and growth of Christianity in South India. *Palittupattu*, *Akanānūru*, *Puranānūru* and *Cilappatikāram* are the important ones among them⁷².

The letters and other works of the missionaries from the West are the best sources to know more of the Law of Thomas. Of these I shall deal with later. The decrees of the Synod of Diamper also reflect the customs and traditions of the Thomas Christians⁷³.

III. A Brief Survey of the Law of Thomas⁷⁴

The Law of Thomas is to be drawn from the complex socio-politico-religious system of the Thomas Christian community. It has zealously preserved several pristine elements of

⁷¹ Cf. P. J. THOMAS, *The Christian Literature of Kerala*, (Malayalam), Mannanam, 1935.

⁷² Cf. JAMES THOOMKUZHY, "Kerala at the time of Mar Thoma", in PERUMALIL, *India and Christianity*, pp. 320-341; SREEDHARAMENON, *Kerala History* (Mal.), NBS, 1967, pp. 34-37.

⁷³ SCARIA ZACHARIA, "Social Customs" pp. 83-98.

⁷⁴ The following works were of great use for the present author to compile this treatise: PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, pp. 79-118; ID., *Hierarchy*, pp. 99-100; ID., *Our Rite*; ID., "Hindu in Culture, Christian in Religion, Oriental in Worship", in *STCE*, II, pp. 107-111.; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*

early Christianity. At the same time it adapted itself to the existential cultural situation in India. In the following exposition the aim is to point out the important tenets, institutions and practices of the Law of Thomas. For a better understanding we shall look at it from three points of view: (A) Socio-Political Life, (B) Socio-Ecclesiastical Life and (C) Liturgico-Religious Life of the Thomas Christian community.

A. Socio-Political Life

The spontaneous adaptation in the past of the Thomas Christian community to its cultural environment is evident in its socio-Political life. The important aspects are analysed under the following headings.

1. Name (Appellation)

Nasrāṇi, a local derivation of the word 'Nazarene', which the orthodox Jews gave to the nascent Christian sect, has been generally the community's accepted designation in official records⁷⁵. A *Nasrāṇi* was also called by the local people, as mentioned above, *Māṟgakkāran*, *Māṟgavāsi*, and *Māṟgappilla* or *Māppila*. Because of the high social status, especially after the arrival of the influential Syrian colonialists, the Thomas Christians were called *Māppilas* (Nobles). On account of their religion they were called *Nasrāṇi Māppilas*. *Māppila* was also added to their proper names as a honorific title. The people of the neighbouring kingdom called them 'Sons of Kings' and *Tarisāykal*

pp. 118-179; ANANTHA KRISHNA AYYAR, *The Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*; T. K. JOSEPH, *The Malabar Christians and their Ancient Documents*, Trivandrum, 1929; P. J. TAOMAS, *The Marriage Customs*; KOCHUTHOMMAN KUNNUKUZHY APPOTHIKKARI, *Pariskarappati* (Mal.) Kottayam, 1977; FERROLI, *Jesuits in Malabar*, I, 176-178; ID., 'Malabar Christian Customs and Manners', in *STCE*, II, pp. 126-127; JOSEPH KOLENGADAN, 'Culture and Traditions of the Thomas Christians', in *STCE*, pp. 127-132; SCARIA ZACHARIA, 'Social customs', pp. 83-98; ALEXANDER CHERUKARAKKUNNEL, 'The Hindu Christians of India', in VELLIAN, *The Malabar Church*, OCA, 186. pp. 203-208; E. R. HAMBYE, 'Use et Coutumes Chretiennes de Syriens de l'Inde au XVI siecle', *L'Orient Syrien*, X(1965) pp. 276-277.

⁷⁵ K. M. PANIKKAR dares to define Kerala as the traditional home of 'Namboodhiri, Nazrani and Nair': *Kerala State Reorganisation Committee Report*, quoted by JOSEPH KOLENGADAN, *Op. cit.*, *STCE*, II, p. 128.

or *Tariñanel* (First Kings)⁷⁶. Because of their liturgical language they were also called Syrians (*Suriānikkār*).

For proper names, biblical names with local derivations were in vogue. Still typically Indian names were not unknown among them⁷⁷. For family names they shared their ancestry with their non-Christian brethren.

2. Community Organisation

The Thomas Christians used to maintain a joint family system. Like the family lineage of the Hindu Brahmins, that of the Thomas Christians was of a patriarchal nature.

The community organisation in South India during the early Christian centuries was probably according to the system of *Manram* — a kind of autonomous village, the heads of the families being the members of the administrative body⁷⁸. (Probably the tradition about the foundation of seven Churches⁷⁹ in Malabar by St. Thomas was about the establishment of seven Christian *Manrams* or communities). The *Yōgam* of the Malabar Church had its origin in the system of *Manram*.

The ecclesiastical organisation under the leadership of *Jālikkukartavian* (Archdeacon) gave the Christians unity and growth as well as political force. They formed a kind of 'Christian Republic'⁸⁰.

⁷⁶ MUNDADAN *Traditions*, p. 137; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 85.

⁷⁷ For example Ammini, Kochappan, Kunjamma, Eravikorthan and many others: Cf. JOSEPH KOLENGADAN, op. cit. *STCE*, II, p. 128.; JOSE N. K., *Tamrasasangal*, pp. 2-4.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Patittupattu* 23: 5, 25: 4, 29: 9; P. K. GOPALAKRISHNAN, *The Cultural History of Kerala* (Mal.), p. 150; KODAPUZHA, *Indian Church History*, p. 25; JCSF N. K., *Atima Kerala Sabha* (Mal.), Vaikom, 1977 pp. 19, 152.

⁷⁹ These 7 churches were at Crangannore (Mussiris), Palayoor, Kottakkavu (Paravoor), Kokkamangalam, Niranam (Trippaleswaram), Kollam (Quilon) and Nilackal (Chaya).

⁸⁰ PAULINUS, *Viaggio*, p. 80; Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 124-125.

3. The Christian Dynasty or the 'King of the Christians'

The 'Thomas Christians' tradition hints at the existence of a Christian dynasty around the period extending from the IX to XV centuries: "Finding themselves powerful, the Christians chose a king from among themselves to rule over them."⁸¹ Many historians identify this dynasty with the Villarvattam (Biliarte) royal family⁸². To show the orthodoxy of this dynasty, they quote the letters of Pope John XXII in 1330 and of Pope Eugene IV in 1439 to the Christian Kings of India.⁸³ More evidence is drawn from the events which took place after the arrival of the Portuguese in Malabar. With joy and happiness the representatives of the Thomas Christians approached them and presented to Vasco de Gama the scepture of their own royal family, which had by that time become extinct, as a token of allegiance, requesting him to take them under his King's protection⁸⁴.

Historians are not unanimous about the existence of such a Christian dynasty⁸⁵. Our limited scope does not allow us to go deeper into the subject. All agree that there were among kings special protectors of the Christians. We may say that the Villarvattom kings, if not themselves Christians, were at least protectors of the Thomas Christians. When the royal family became extinct, this right and duty was passed over to the king of Cochin who inherited the Villarvattom principality.

⁸¹ *Journal of Asiatic Society*, vol. I., p. 179, cited in PANJIKKARAN, *The Syrian Church in Malabar*, p. 34.

⁸² For details, Cf. M. O. JOSEPH NEDUMKUNNAM, *Villarvattam* (Mal.), Book-A-Month Club, Ernakulam, 1952, ID., *Kerala Christians*, pp. 169-176; GOUVEA, *Jornada*, p. 49; KOODAPUZHA, *Indian Church History* pp. 131-134.

⁸³ Cf. NAGAM AIYA, *Travancore State Mannel*, II, p. 147. Pope Eugene IV addresses the king as follows: "To my most beloved son in Christ, Thomas, the illustrious Emperor of the Indians, Health and Apostolic Benediction. There has often reached us a constant rumour that Your Serenity and all who are subject to your kingdom are true Christians"; cited in PANJIKKARAN, *The Syrian Church in Malabar*, p. 34; Cf. also ASSEMANI, *BO*, IV, p. 442; MCKENZIE, *Christianity in Travancore*, p. 10.

⁸⁴ J. De BARROS, *Da Asia*, t. I. part. II. Lisbon, 1777, lib. 6, ch. 6; cited in THALIATH, *Synod of Diamper*, p. 1.

⁸⁵ According to Father Mundadan, the Villarvattam kings were probably the special protectors of the Thomas Christians: *Traditions*, pp. 125-129.

The Christians were directly under the kings and not under feudal lords; they enjoyed many royal privileges, as we shall see later. *Jālikkukartavian* was considered to be a prince by local kings⁸⁶.

The Christians were very loyal to their kings and they took arms in times of war. The kings used to build Churches and to endow them with tax-free lands. According to a document once found in Chiramel family at Trichur, the king of Cochin used to appoint pastors for the parishes and exact a share of the dowry of the Christian marriages⁸⁷.

4. Social Status

The Thomas Christians enjoyed high social status and were preferred to the Nairs in the society. The privileges granted to them by local rulers through Copper Plate Grants are excellent proofs for this. "In order to preserve their nobility, the Christians never touch a person of inferior caste, not even a Nair".⁸⁸ The caste Hindus believed that the ceremonial touch of the Christians would purify the vessels, wells or other objects polluted by the approach or touch of the low castes. Several low caste artisans (17 or 18) were in the service of the Thomas Christians and under their protection. One of these non-Christian caste groups called *cāvērs* (suicidal squad; the Europeans called

⁸⁶ A document written in Portuguese before 1786 AD speaks of the Archdeacon thus: "The Archdeacon... is the first among the 72 princes of Perumpatapil (i. e. king of Cochin); the said Archdeacon is, according to custom, the man to crown the king in order that the king may be recognised as king; the coronation consists in this that the Archdeacon puts a gold cross with a golden chain on the neck of the king, and he (the king) must wear this for five days before he is called king of Perumpatapil", *Noticias do Reino do Malabar* in *BIBL. NACIONAL, Fundo Geral*, 536, ff. 1-29; cited in PODIPARA, 'Hindu in culture...', in *STCE*, II, p. 108.

⁸⁷ P. KURIAN found such a document in the Chiramel house at Trichur, which was then 420 years old: *The Orthodoxy of the St. Thomas Christians*, pp. 10-11, the note; cited in CCO Fonti, II, VIII (Syro-Malankara), pp. 40-41. The present author tried in vain to get further information about this document.

⁸⁸ LA CROZE, *Christianisme aux Indes*, 1723, cited in D. FERROLI, "Malabar Christian Customs and Manners", in *STCE*, II; p. 127; Cf. also SCARIA ZACHARIA, "Social Customs" p. 93.

them *Amouchi*) was enlisted to defend their masters -- the Thomas Christians -- even by shedding their blood⁸⁹.

In the family the father was supreme. Men and women would not sit together to eat. At meals, wives would serve their husbands, and would eat only after the husband had finished. The elderly were given the greatest respect possible.

5. Privileges

We have already seen that the high social status of the Thomas Christians was comented by certain privileges granted to them by the local kings⁹⁰. Whenever allusion is made to these privileges, mention is made also of some written documents which describe them, namely, the Copper Plate Grants which have already been referred to.

According to tradition, the Thomas Christians enjoyed 72 privileges through these Copper Plate Grants; but according to scholars, there is ambiguity in listing them. The list given by M. O. Joseph Nedumkunnam is accepted by many as the most probable⁹¹. They are the following: (1) *Aṭima* (the privilege to have slaves or bondsmen), (2) *Aminūlam* (a kind of tax), (3) *Arappura* (granary), (4) *Ambāri* (howdah on elephant) (5) *Arpu* (cheers, also called *Kurava*) (6) *Alavaṭṭam* (peacock feather fan -- a royal insignia), (7) *Iṭupaṭi* or *Paṭipura* (gate-house), (8) *Uccipūvu* (head-gear, flower like ornament for the crown of the head), (9) *Edampiri Samkhu* (conch with left screw) (10) *Kacca* (hem of the garment tucked into the waist band, robs), (11) *Kaccapuram* (a golden girdle of women) (12) *Kanakamuṭi* (golden diadem), (13) *Kālcilambu* (anklet), (14) *Kulira Savāri* (horse riding), (15) *Kuzhal* (lute or bugles), (16) *Kaithala* (bangles) (17) *Koṭi* (ensign), (18) *Caṇṇamelkaṭṭi* (a kind of canopy), (19) *Cemkombu* (a kind of tax from cattles), (20) *Celli* (a kind of tax from paddy), (21) *Takil* (kettle drum), (22) *Taṇṭu* or *Antōlam* (litter) (23) *Tazha* (a kind

⁸⁹ VINCENT MARIA, *Il Viaggio*, II, ch. 5, cited in SCARIA ZACHARIA, *Social Customs*, pp. 93-94; CCO, *Fonti* II, VIII (Syro-Malankara) p. 37.

⁹⁰ One of the request of the representatives of the Thomas Christians to the Portuguese at their arrival was to restore from the local rulers all their rights and privileges which they were enjoying traditionally. Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 130-131; ID., *The Arrival*, pp. 72-75, 100.

⁹¹ NEDUMKUNNAM, *Kerala Christians*, pp. 155-156.

of decorated fan or royal umbrella), (24) *Tīṇṭalakaṭṭal* (untouchability, the privilege of purifying things polluted by the touch or approach by the low castes), (25) *Tūkkumanjam* (swinging cot), (26) *Tongal* (a kind of pendant decoration), (27) *Tōlvala* (shoulder bangle), (28) *Nagarattōraṇam* (triumphal or ornamental arch, gateway; strings of leaves and flowers hung across the streets,) (29) *Naṭayum Naṭattum* (processions with heraldry, (30) *Nantāvilakku* (a special kind of lamp / torch), (31) *Nāṇkupariṣakkuṭama* (the control over four classes of artisans (Kamalaṟs), namely, the castes of goldsmith, blacksmith, carpenter and moulder), (32) *Nāyāṭṭubhōgam* (privilege for hunting), (33) *Nāluvaṅkurava* (shouting by four dependent castes of people to show the glory of the Christians), (34) *Neṭṭiyakuṭa* (legal parasole), (35) *Neṭṭūrpeṭṭi* (cloth box), (36) *Neṭṭipattam* (ornamental forehead coverings of elephants; royal tiara of princes) (37) *Nērvāl* (rod of justice; sword); (38) *Pakalvilakku* (day lamps), (39) *Panjavattam* (5 kinds of delicious dishes), (40) *Panjavarṇakkuṭa* (multi-coloured royal umbrella), (41) *Panjavādhyam* (indigenous orchestra with five instruments), (42) *Paṭṭucaṭṭa* (silk coat) (43) *Paṭṭumuṇṭu* (silk dhoti) (44) *Paṭṭurumāl* (silken tassal), (45) *Paṇipuṭava* (embroidary robs), (46) *Palakkam* (gold necklace), (47) *Pantal vitānam* (pandal decorations), (48) *Paravalāni* (carpet) (49) *Patinēzhupariṣakkuṭama* (control over 17 dependant castes), (50) *Pallakku* (palanquin), (51) *Pāvāṭa* (royal cloth), (52) *Maṇakkolam* (platform), (53) *Maddalam* (tembourine), (54) *Muṭikizhābharaṇam* (hair-lock ornaments), (55) *Munkai* or *Nayakalvam* (leadership), (56) *Munkayyil palakkam* (bracelet in the forearm, a symbol of authority), (57) *Muncollu* (heraldry, right to give advice), (58) *Munmūlam* (a kind of tax), (59) *Muraṣu* (battle drum), (60) *Mettiyadi* (wooden chappels), (61) *Rājabhōgam* (royal tax), (62) *Rājasamakṣam Irippu* (honour to sit before the king), (63) *Valampiriṣamkhu* (conch with right screw), (64) *Viripantal* (honour to erect pandal / pavilion) (65) *Vīṇa* (Indian lute, a royal instrument) (66) *Vīraṣṛmkala* (royal chain), (67) *Vīrallaṇṭu* (heroic rod / sceptre), (68) *Vīramaddhalam* or *Perumpara* (royal/war drums), (69) *Vīravādhyam* (war bugles), (70) *Vencāmaram* (beautified deer-haired tassal), (71) *Samkhu* (conch), and (72) *Hastakaṭṭakam* or *Kaivala* (bracelet).

Chummar Choondal, in his list of the 72 privileges includes the following ^{91a}: *Ankaṇam* (courtyard), *Anasavāri* (elephant riding), *Kaṇkaṇam* (bangles), *Ceṇṭa* (drum), *Tambōru* (big drum), *Muti* (crown), *Deevetti* (indigenous torch), *Nettikkeṭṭu* (turban), *Bhūm-karamozhivu* (tax free land), and *Palamarangal* (forest concessions). He excludes the following ones from the list of Joseph Nedumkunnam: *Aṭima*, *Arappura*, *Caṇṇamelkaṇṇi*, *Takil*, *Nantavilakku*, *Nāluvākkurava*, *Panjavallam*, *Munkai*, *Muncollu*, *Muraṣu* and *Vīrattaṇṭu*,

It seems that the Thomas Christians enjoyed different privileges at different times and under different dynasties. Their total number is traditionally accepted as 72 since there is specification of that number in the 'Quilon plates'.

6. Dress and Ornaments⁹²

During the Pre-Portuguese period, the dress and ornaments of the Thomas Christian men were in no way glaringly distinct from those of their Hindu neighbours. They used to wear an ornamented piece of cloth from waist downwards to the knees; they wore ornaments on their head and arms. Like the nobles of the society they used to bore their ears and wear ear lobes (*Kaṭukkan*). A tuft of hair used to be kept on their heads. They wore a gold or silver cross around their neck or on the tuft of hair as their distinctive sign.

Nobility and modesty were manifest in the dress of the Thomas Christian women.⁹³ They wore a white garment seven yards long, and one and a quarter yard broad. A number of fringes forming a fan like appendage behind rendered their dress artistically elegant. The upper garment was called *Kuppāyam*. As they went to the church they had a veil like outer garment, with gold brocade, reaching to the ground. Till recently the Christian women of the Kunnamkulam area in Malabar used to hold a special kind of umbrella to avoid being seen by men, as

^{91a} CHUMMAR CHOONDAL, *Christian Folk Songs*, pp. 76-77.

⁹² BROWN, *Indian Christians of St. Thomas*. pp. 199; SCARIA ZACHARIA, "Social Customs..." pp. 87-89; Synod of Diamper, session IX, decree 17.

⁹³ Cf. MRS. K. M. MATHEW, "The Syrian Christian Women", in *STCE*, II, pp. 133-134.

was the practice of the Hindu Nambūtiri women. Besides the ear ornaments called *Mēkkāmōtiram* and *Kammal*, they used to wear various kinds of necklaces (for example, *patakkamāla*), bracelets (*vala*), anklets (*Tala*), loin ornaments (*Ealas*), girdles (*Aranjāṇam*) and rings. Widows would abstain from wearing these ornaments. Christian women used no nose ornaments.

7. System of Education

In the early days the boys were sent to *Kalaris* or schools and were taught by *Aśāns* or *Paṇikārs* (teachers) both letters and the arms. The education in armaments began at the age of eight and continued till the age of twenty-five⁹⁴. The girls stopped their studies with the primary education and got married. The boys continued their studies even after marriage.

The *Paṇikars* or teachers were held in high esteem by the people. If Christian *paṇikars* were available, the Christian children would not be sent to non-Christian teachers; if there were not, they would be entrusted to the Hindu (Nair) *Paṇikars* to be educated by them. These Hindu teachers would give them even religious education on Christianity.⁹⁵

8. Occupations

The Thomas Christians distinguished themselves in such professions as agriculture, trade and military service⁹⁶. Gibbon writes:

“In arms, in arts and possibly in virtue, they (the Thomas Christians) excelled the natives of Hindustan. The husbandman cultivated the palm trees and the merchants were enriched by pepper trade. Their soldiers preceded the Nairs or the nobles of Malabar, and their hereditary privileges were respected by the gratitude or the fear of the king of Cochin and the Zamorine himself”⁹⁷.

⁹⁴ GOUVEA, *Jornada*, pp. 61–62; According to Barbosa, the education of children started at the age of seven: *Book of Barbosa* (Ed. by MANSEL LONGWORTH DAMES), London, pp. 39–40.

⁹⁵ GOUVEA, *Jornada*, pp. 61–62; SCARIA ZACHARIA, *Social Customs*, p. 91.

⁹⁶ For details, Cf. PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 84; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 119–121; SCARIA ZACHARIA, *Social Customs*, pp. 91–92.

⁹⁷ GIBBON E., *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. VIII, Paris, 1789, p. 285.

The *Jālikkukartavian* or the prince (Archdeacon) of the Thomas Christians was always escorted by robust warriors. "They (the Thomas Christians) were always well armed; murderers were unknown among them; on going to the church they used to leave their guns or spears in the porch outside" ⁹⁹.

Christian women, following the customs of the noble castes, engaged themselves in household affairs.

9. Architecture

The architecture of the Thomas Christians was in no way different from that of the high class of the society¹⁰⁰. The privileges attached to such constructions gave permanence to it. *Paṭippura* (gate-house), *Arappura* (granary), *Aṅkaṇam* (courtyard), etc., were such privileges. The houses were generally made of wood (probably from the 4th century onwards) and were often thatched with cocunut leaves. The floor of the house was plastered frequently with cow-dung mixed with powdered charcoal. The main building faced the rising sun. According to the '*taccuśāstra*' or science of architecture, they were having *eṭṭukeṭṭu* (houses with eight *kāyyālas* or halls around the *aṅkaṇam*) or *nāḷukeṭṭu* (houses with four *kāyyālas*). The following are the important portions of such a construction: (1) *Mālikappura* (the main building of living rooms with *pūmukha* or entrance hall, *nāṭayilakam* or main room, *prārlanāmuri* or prayer room, bed room, etc.), (2) *arappura* (granary), (3) *ūttupura* (dining room with kitchen), (4) *tozhuttu* (cow-shed) and (5) *kulam* (tank or well).¹⁰¹

10. Festivals

The Christians and Hindus alike celebrated many common or national feasts; for example, *ōṇam*, *viṣu*¹⁰². In connection with their feasts — either church feasts or social feasts (*ulsavas*) — there used to be processions with all kinds of pomps. Much of these

⁹⁸ GOUVEA, *Jornada*, p. 49, 61v; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 120-121.

⁹⁹ VINCENZO MARIA, *Il Viaggio*, p. 151.

¹⁰⁰ For details. Cf. JAMES MENACHERRY, "Thomas Christian Architecture", in *STCE*, II, pp. 137-151.

¹⁰¹ Cf. CHUMMAR CHOONDAL, *Christian Folk Songs* p. 77.

¹⁰² Cf. Synod of Diamper, Session IX, Decree 4, cited in SCARIA ZACHARIA, *Social Customs*, p. 85; FERROLI, "Malabar Christian Customs and Manners", in *STCE*, II. n. 126.

are believed to be modelled on Buddhist practices¹⁰³. Royal umbrellas (*muttukuṭa*), musical instruments (*panjavādhyam*), torches, pop-guns and so forth were used on these festive occasions. Elephants decorated with many ornaments were led in processions to add solemnity to the display. The custom of borrowing and lending processional paraphernalia from and to the Hindu temples was in vogue in the past among the Christians.

Mārgamkali, perhaps an adaptation of the Brahmin 'journey dance' (*yātrakkali*) was the most important festive dance of the Christians¹⁰⁴. It was a sort of group dance depicting the traditional heritage of the Thomas Christians. It was performed in two parts; the first part, called *vallakkali*, was mainly concerned with the singing of the *Mārgamkalippāṭu*; the second part, *pariṣamuṭṭukali* was purely a martial dance with sword and shield. To wean away the Christians from *Kathakali* (Kerala's proudest contribution to Indian art) and other local artistic forms, the European missionaries even designed a counter dance form called *caviṭṭunāṭakam*¹⁰⁵.

Festive occasions were always marked by preparation of special foods. Some of them were exclusive to the Christians.¹⁰⁶

11. The Law of Inheritance

The *makkallāya* system (son inheriting from the father) was in force among the Christians. All sons inherited¹⁰⁷; but the daughters were provided only with a dowry. If a couple had only female issues, they used to adopt a male from the nearest kinsmen to inherit their property; this adoption often took place

¹⁰³ SREEDHARA MENON, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, p. 13.

¹⁰⁴ CHUMMAR CHOONDAL, "Folk Traditions of Kerala Christians", in JOHN, *Christian Heritage of Kerala*, pp. 113-114.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. SABEENA RAPHY, "Theatrical Traditions of Christians of Kerala", in *Ibid.*, pp. 103-109.

¹⁰⁶ For example, on Maundy Thursday, after supper, the head of the family used to distribute to the members a special kind of unleavened bread dipped in cocunut milk and jaggery. *Neyyappam*, *Ayniappam* and *Kozhukkotta* were some of these special foods.

¹⁰⁷ Among the Brahmins only the eldest son inherited from the father. The Nairs were following the *marumakkattayam* system (son-in-law inheriting from the father).

in the presence of a bishop.¹⁰⁸ The Synod of Diamper found this system defective.¹⁰⁹

To conclude this section on the socio-political life of the Thomas Christians, the words of Father Podipara are worth quoting, who, after analysing the Hindu culture of the Thomas Christians, writes :

“In the face of all that we have said above no non-Christian can say that Christianity is a denationalising force. Tradition says that the first Thomas Christians were mostly from high castes who continued to keep up their former socio-political status side by side with their non-Christian brethren. Christianity did not destroy, but did ennoble what good they had cultivated by themselves.”¹¹⁰

B. Socio-Ecclesiastical Life

The socio-ecclesiastical life of the Thomas Christians is very interesting to the students of canon law. The present treatise intends to describe briefly the important pre-Portuguese juridical institutions and persons of the Indian Church of the Thomas Christians. The ecclesiastical and social life of the community was so integrated that we cannot explain these institutions and persons without analysing their social background. The important sources are the writings of the missionaries; but they are few and scattered.

1. Ecclesiastical Organisation

As mentioned in the previous section, the social organisation of the Thomas Christians was more or less based on the ecclesiastical organisation which, according to tradition, had its foundation on the Apostolate of St. Thomas in India. Information is lacking about the growth of the Churches or communities or *Manrams* founded by the Apostle. (According to tradition, the Apostle founded seven Churches in Malabar, another one in Mylapore and probably others elsewhere in India).

¹⁰⁸ Synod of Diamper, decree 21 of the session IX; Cf. SCARIA ZACHARIA, *Social Customs*, p. 90; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁹ Synod of Diamper, decree 20 of the Session IX; SCARIA ZACHARIA, *Social Customs* p. 90.

¹¹⁰ PODIPARA, “Hindu in Culture” in *STCE*, II, p. 108.

From the 16th century traditions we understand that in the past the *Jālikkukartavian* (Archdeacon), the religio-political leader of the community, gave unity and leadership to the Christians who were often divided under different local principalities.¹¹¹ The prelates coming from Babylon, sometimes more than one at the same time, were giving them spiritual leadership. The *yōgam* was decisive in the administration of the Church. As mentioned in the first article, the faith of the community was Catholic, although no direct contact with the successor of Peter was then possible.

The life of the Christians was centred on the church. A good many of the Christians settled around the church in rows of houses called *Angaṭis* (bazar) which later became business centres. A few of the Christians were living far away from the church, even in forests.

2. Prelates¹¹²

Nothing certain is known about the canonical order established by the Apostle Thomas; but tradition holds that, as did St. Paul in the Churches he founded, so too did Thomas appoint sacred ministers to succeed him in the Christian communities he had evangelised. According to tradition (*Rambān Pāṭṭu*) the Apostle Ordained Kepha and Paul bishops; the former was appointed head of the Indian Church at Kodungallur, the latter bishop of Mylapore.¹¹³ This is supposed to be the first hierarchy of India. Authors like Mingana¹¹⁴, Podipara¹¹⁵, and Koodapuzha¹¹⁶ point out the possibility of the existence in India of indigenous bishops and even of an indigenous hierarchy, at later periods.

Tradition is unanimous in asserting that the prelates of the Thomas Christians came from Chaldea for many centuries before the arrival of the Portuguese in India. According to the

¹¹¹ Cf. APF, *SOCG*, vol. 233, f. 111.

¹¹² Cf. PODIPARA, *Hierarchy*, pp. 32 sq; MUNDADAN, *Traditions* p. 43; For details, Cf. ASARIPARAMBIL, *The Malabar Church and her Legislation*, PUL., Rome, 1962; PADINJAREKUTT, *The Appointment of Bishops in the Chaldean Church*, PIOS, Rome, 1967; VALIAMATTAM, *Episcopacy*, : PUG, Rome, 1967.

¹¹³ Cf. PODIPARA, *Hierarchy*, pp. 24-26.

¹¹⁴ MINGANA, *The early spread*, p. 29.

¹¹⁵ PODIPARA, *Hierarchy*, p. 32.

¹¹⁶ KOODAPUZHA, *Indian Church History*, p. 130.

report of Joseph the Indian in 1502, bishops and archbishops were sent to the provinces of India and other places by the *Kātōlika* (Patriarch) of Babylon¹¹⁷. More details of this hierarchical relationship with the Chaldean Church are given elsewhere. The powers, titles, See and residence of these prelates require special mention here.

i) *Powers of the Prelates*: India (*Hendo* in Syriac) was one of the most important exterior ecclesiastical provinces to which the Chaldean patriarchs used to send bishops consecrated by them. Delegations were also used to be sent from India asking for bishops.¹¹⁸ The prelates were enthusiastically received by the Thomas Christians and were given their greatest respect.

Documents are not clear about the powers of the bishops during the Chaldean period. According to a letter written in 1504 by four Chaldean bishops from Malabar, the first thing that the two bishops who came to Malabar after a long period did was to consecrate altars and ordain priests, "for they had been without Fathers for a long time."¹¹⁹ Some of these Chaldean bishops would return to the patriarch with the offerings they get, as did Mar Thomas around the year 1500.

The nature of the hierarchy and position of these prelates is not clear to us. In 1503 three Bishops were consecrated and sent to the "countries of India and the islands of the sea that are between Dabag, Sin and Masin".¹²⁰ One of them was a metropolitan. There were then altogether five Chaldean bishops in Malabar and we do not know how they exercised jurisdiction. According to Penteado, a Portuguese missionary in Malabar of that period, they were legates of equal status, dependent on one another.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ *Paesi*, f. 171 sq.

¹¹⁸ Such a delegation was sent in 1490 in which Joseph the Indian was a member. At the request, the Patriarch consecrated two bishops and later three more and sent them to Hendo (India), Socotra and China; but the principal seat of the bishops was Hendo. Cf. FRANCIS ROS, *Relacao da Serra* f. 86 v, cited in MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 138.

¹¹⁹ SCHURHAMMER, *Malabar and Rome*, p. 3.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*

¹²¹ SILVA REGO, *Documentacao*, IV, f. 77 sq; Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 141.

The administration of the Church was in the hands of the archdeacon; the bishops were concentrating on the spiritual growth of the community. Their important offices were the consecration of altars and the ordination of priests.¹²² Sometimes they reserved the administration of baptisms to themselves.¹²³

ii) *The 'See of Thomas'*: It was with pride that the Thomas Christians spoke about the 'See of Thomas' in India. The Vatican Syriac Codex 22, in its colophon, makes mention of the "Holy See of the Apostle Thomas", whose occupant in 1301 was Mar Jacob, "the Ruler of the entire Holy Church of the Christians of India", who was then residing at Shengala or Crangannore in Malabar.¹²⁴ In the 12th century Odericus Vitalis and later the author of the book *Passio* certified the existence in India of the "See of the Apostle Thomas and the Catholic faith even unto this day".¹²⁵ Bishop Francis Ros tried to establish this common belief in the 'See of Thomas' in a controversy with the bishop of Cochin. By quoting many ancient authorities, he demonstrated that St. Thomas founded his See (through his martyrdom) at Mylapore, which later was transferred to Cranganore and then to Angamaly.¹²⁶

The territory of the 'See of Thomas' was clear from the title of the metropolitan. It was Hendo or 'All-India' and its confines¹²⁷.

¹²² Cf. SILVA REGO, *Documentacao*, XII, f. 402.

¹²³ There were complaints by the missionaries that the Chaldean prelates reserved baptisms for pecuniary motives: Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 168-170.

¹²⁴ Cf. PODIPARA, *Hierarchy*, p. 35.

¹²⁵ Cf. PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, pp. 105, 77 note 33; ZALESKI, *Saints in India*, p. 144.

¹²⁶ Cf. ARSI, *Goa-Mal.*, vol. 65 (Controversia), ff. 3, 4v, 6v, 43v, 44; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 90 note 12, 91, 106, 107.

¹²⁷ Bishop Francis Ros gives the traditional meaning of the word Hendo as follows: "Hendo, which is the same as India... extends from the river Indus till the Cape of Comorin", ARSI, *Goa-Mal.*, 65, f. 43; For details, MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 143-144.

iii) *Metropolitan and Gate of All-India*: The official title was “Metropolitan and Gate of All-India”¹²⁸. Father Campori, ‘according to the information from several Chaldean books and from well known facts’, makes the following observation: “The Bishopric of the Serra was always an Archbishopric, and is the most ancient in the whole of India Its Archbishops and prelates were always called ‘the Metropolitan of the whole of Hendo’ ”.¹²⁹ Bishop Francis Ros, on the authority of a very ancient book he consulted, asserts that the ecclesiastical head of the Thomas Christians was always called ‘Metropolitan of India’.¹³⁰

‘Gate’ is a biblical (Mt. 16, 18) and Oriental symbol of public authority. “Gate of All-India” meant the highest rank of authority in the Indian Church.

iv) *Residence of Prelates*: About the residence of the prelates, Bishop Francis Ros puts forward the following theory: “From the settling down of the Christians of Mylapore in and around Crangannore, the prelates always resided in Crangannore; and Angamaly was later chosen as a place of safety”.¹³¹ It is quite probable that the Crangannore Church, apparently the most important Church of the Thomas Christians, was considered the *Cathedra* of the Metropolitan of India.

3. *Jatikkukartavian* or Archdeacon

As far as we can trace back, we understand that the administration of the Thomas Christian community was in the hands of the *Jātikkukartavian* (Lord of the nation or race).¹³² One cannot say anything for certain about the origin and development of this office. In the ecclesiastical circles, he was often

¹²⁸ ARSI, *Goa-Mal*, vol. 65, ff. 4,45; ASSEMANI, *BO*, III, 2, p. 435. PODIPARA, *Hierarchy*, pp. 32-35.

¹²⁹ ARSI, *Goa-Mal*, vol. 65, f. 4; Cf. also KOODAPUZHA, “The History...”, in *STCE*, II, p. 31.

¹³⁰ ARSI, *Goa-Mal*, vol. 65, f. 43.

¹³¹ ARSI, *Goa-Mal*, vol. 65 (Controversia), ff. 6, 7 v, 43v, 45v-46; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 144-145.

¹³² For details, Cf. KOLLAPARAMBIL, Archdeacon; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 95; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 146; JOSE N. K., *Historical Problems*, pp. 109-164. The word *Jatikkukartavian*, which signifies the one responsible for the nation or the one who governs the nation or race, is of Sanskrit origin and this shows Aryan influence in its usage.

called 'Archdeacon'. His office was more than that of the Chaldean institution of archdeacon.¹³³ Ibn-at Tayyib (XI C.) quotes the Chaldean Patriarch Mar Timothy I (VIII C.) addressing the 'Archdeacon of India' as the "head of the faithful of India".¹³⁴ European missionaries also testify that "he was the prince and head of the Christians of St. Thomas".¹³⁵ He had the titles "Archdeacon of India, Archdeacon and Gate of All-India, Governor of India" and so on.¹³⁶ According to a document kept in the *National Library of Lisbon*, "the Archdeacon, the first among the 72 princes of Perumpatāpil (Cochin), was the one to crown the king of Cochin so that the king would be recognised in the country".^{137a}

Even when there were more Chaldean bishops, it seems that there was only one archdeacon. He was always a native and represented the Christians for their socio-political purposes. Father Valignano writes that the archdeacon was even more powerful than the Chaldean metropolitans.^{137b} He was the president of the 'general *yōgam*' (assembly) of the Christians and was the executor of its decisions. Although the office of the archdeacon was not hereditary, the Pakalomattam family, originally from Palayur, claimed a number of archdeacons.¹³⁸

¹³³ The Synod at Seleucia in the year 410 AD under Mar Isaac determined the institution and position of the archdeacon in the Church. According to canon 15 of the Synod, every bishop should have an archdeacon. He should be a holy, intelligent and merciful man and must be well informed of the Church. He is the tongue and right hand of the bishop. He should supervise over the clerics ... Cf. T. J. LAMY, *Concilium Seleuciaie et Ctesiphonte habitum anno 410*, Louvain: 1868, pp. 58-72; Cf. also DENZINGER, *Ritus Orientalis*, I, 117, 122, 123.

¹³⁴ Cf. KOLLAPARAMBIL, *Archdeacon*, p. 80; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 96.

¹³⁵ APF, SRCG, vol. 233, f. 111.

¹³⁶ Cf. KOLLAPARAMBIL, *Archdeacon*, p. 223.

^{137a} *Bibl. Nacional* (Lisbon), *Fondo Geral*, "Noticias do Reino do Malabar" vol. 536, ff. 1-29; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 85.

^{137b} WICKI, *Documenta Indica*, X, p. 883: The Jesuit Visitor Father Valignano to the Jesuit General on 16 September 1577. Valignano writes again that "it is the Archdeacon who commands, governs and maintains the Archbishop". *Ibid.*, pp. 884-885; cited in THEKKEDATH, *History of Christianity*, II, p. 60.

¹³⁸ Cf. FERROLI, *Jesuits* I, p. 178; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 96.

4. The Clergy and the Religious ¹³⁹

The existence of a good number of native clergy attached to each Church is very well attested to by the documents of the 16th century and later, although early references are scanty. Priests were known by the name *Kallanārs* or *Kassaārs*.¹⁴⁰ The clerics below the priests' grade were known as *Cemāśas*.

i) *Diocesan Clergy*: Priests were generally ordained for a parish and were called *Dēśattu Paṭṭakkār*. Outside the church they were not much different from the laymen in their dress. According to Joseph the Indian, priests did not wear the tonsure; instead they carried at the top of their heads a tuft of hair decorated with a Cross.¹⁴¹ From the testimonies of the early missionaries we understand that the priests had a special dress of their own consisting of long loose pants and long loose chemis (shirts) with a sailor's collar.¹⁴² Barbosa in 1518 wrote: "They wear shirts, and turbans on their heads; they go bare foot, and wear long beards".¹⁴³

The priests were from respectable families and were generally married. They were ordained for a parish after getting the *Dēśakkuri* or the approval of the parish assembly called *yōgam*. Sometimes boys of 16 or 17 years old were ordained priests because of the frequent long absence of bishops in Malabar. All the priests

¹³⁹ For details on Syro-Malabar priests, Cf. PUTHIYAKUNNEL, *Syro-Malabar Clergy*; ISAAC ALANCHERRY, *Priesthood in the Chaldean Church*; PUG, Rome, 1965; KATTUAMANA, *Clerical Celibacy in the Malabar Church*. PUU, 1973.

¹⁴⁰ This can be a malabarisation of the Syriac word *Qasisa* = priest (Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 147). It can be also the derivation from the Syriac *Kahna* = priest, with the addition of *ar*, the Dravidian honorific termination. Another explanation is given by Vincent Mary: *Kassanari* means *Kasis Nair* = priests of Nairs (VINCENZO MARIA, *Il Viaggio*, p. 146). In the past, the word 'Nair' was analogous with soldiers. Since Christians were also soldiers, they were sometimes entitled the 'Nairs': Cf. PUTHIYAKUNNEL, *Syro-Malabar Clergy*, p. 65.

¹⁴¹ *Paesi*, p. 158; For more details about the clerical habit, cf. PUTHIYAKUNNEL, *Syro-Malabar Clergy*, pp. 161-180; RAULIN, *Historia Malabaricae*, p. 389.

¹⁴² The Jacobite priests of Malabar still keep this dress: cf. PUTHIYAKUNNEL, *Syro-Malabar Clergy*, p. 168.

¹⁴³ BARBOSA, *An Account of the Countries*, II, p. 101.

of the parish recited Divine Office in choir and their assembly governed the parish, headed by the seniormost at whose direction the others performed the parochial functions by turn. Other than a share from the income of the church properties, the source of income for priests was mainly the offerings for baptism, marriage, and the commemoration feast called *cāllam*, which they divided equally among themselves.¹⁴⁴

ii) *Priestly Formation*: Regarding the education and formation of the clergy before the contact with the western missionaries, we get only very scanty information. According to the report of Joseph the Indian, the Thomas Christians had “excellent doctors, study of letters and books of prophets”¹⁴⁵. Some of the early missionaries write that the ordinary priests learned only to read Syriac, the liturgical language, just enough to perform the different functions attached to their office¹⁴⁶. They were trained under certain *Malpāns* (doctors, teachers) who were generally the parish priests themselves or other well reputed elderly priests. Such a formation had a lot of similarity with the *guru-kula* system of training students prevalent in the locality^{147a}. The ‘First Mass’ was celebrated with great solemnity^{147b}.

Besides ordinary *Malpanates*, there were also certain educational centres where a selected few were trained. According to the report of the visit of father Carneiro S.J., in 1557, there was such a “University” at Angamaly, where for 50 years Sacred Scriptures had been taught to students from all parts of Malabar¹⁴⁸.

iii) *Monks and Nuns*: Besides the secular clergy, it appears that there were monks and nuns. Joseph the Indian narrated at Venice that “they had monks in black habit who lived in great

¹⁴⁴ SILVA REGO, *Documentacao*, XII, f. 400; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 152.

¹⁴⁵ *Paesi*, p. 159.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 150; PUTHIYAKUNNEL, *Syro-Malabar Clergy*, pp. 64–70.

^{147a} Cf. ANATHIL GEORGE M., *The Theological Formation of the Clergy in India*, Poona, 1956, p. 9.

^{147b} THEKKEDATH, *History of Christianity in India* II, pp. 26–27.

¹⁴⁸ WICKI, *Documenta Indica*, III, p. 804; PUTHIYAKUNNEL, *Syro-Malabar Clergy*, p. 66,

poverty and chastity; similarly also nuns"¹⁴⁹. Goes also writes the same¹⁵⁰. Bishop Francis Ros speaks of the Church of Angamaly as the hermitage of the saints Gervāsis and Protāsis (Śāpōr and Prōt) ¹⁵¹. Paulinus makes mention of the ruins of monasteries at Angamaly, Edappally and Mailakkombu¹⁵².

5. Parish Life and 'Yogam'¹⁵³

The life of the Thomas Christians was church-centered. The churches were built by the people who contributed to the building and to its maintenance, each man contributing what he could. Tithes from earth products and cattles, tithes from marriage dowry, donations for baptisms, etc., were the income of the church.

The administration of the Church was carried on by the assembly of the Thomas Christians called *yōgam*. There were three kinds of *yōgam*: the Parish Assembly (*Eṭavaka Yōgam*), Regional Assembly (*Dēśiya Yōgam*) and General Assembly (*Mahā Yōgam* or *Potu Yōgam* or *Malabar / Malankara Church Yōgam*)¹⁵⁴.

The *yōgam* probably had its origin in the 'Manram system' of the Indo-Dravidians at the beginning of the Christian era. After the Aryan emigration, the Brahmins developed the system of *brahmadēyam*. There was much similarity between the *brahmadēyam* of the Brahmins and the *yōgam* of the Christians.

¹⁴⁹ *Paesi*, f. 158 sq.

¹⁵⁰ GOES, DAMIAO De, *Cronica da Felicissimo Rei D. Manuel*, Ed. by T. M. TEXEIRA, Coimbra, 1926, vol. I, p. 137, 215; PUTHIYAKUNNEL, *Syro-Malabar Clergy*, p. 47, note 26

¹⁵¹ Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 149.

¹⁵² PAULINUS, *Viaggio*, p. 80.

¹⁵³ For details, Cf. MADATHIKUNNEL, *The Parish Organisation in the Malabar Church*, PIOS, Rome, 1967; PALAMATTAM, *Yogam in the Malabar Church*, PIOS, Rome, 1980; VANCHIPURAKAL, *Temporalities of the Malabar Church*, PUG, Rome, 1955; Z. THUDIAMPLACKAL; *The Laity in the Malabar Church*, PUU, Rome, 1966; VAZHAPPILLY, *Penal Legislation in the Malabar Church*, PIOS, Rome, 1966.

¹⁵⁴ In the common usage, people used to mix up the terms *Etavaka yogam*, *Desiya yogam*, *Potu yogam*, *Maha yogam*, *Samutaya yogam* (racial/social assembly), *Kara yogam* (ward assembly) etc; but from the context it was clear that they meant one of these three assemblies.

The priests and the adult lay men of the parish constituted the parish assembly. This assembly was always administering the church properties. It would also see to the means for the sustenance of the priests and the maintenance of the church. The oldest of the priests used to preside over the assembly. The trustees were the honourable people of a parish as it became the norm by convention.

The Regional *Yōgam* was often constituted for the administration of justice. Paremmakal says, "According to the ancient custom of the Malabar Church, no punishment could be inflicted unless the crime was proved before the representatives of four churches"¹⁵⁶. Matters pertaining to the whole Church or community — religious, social and Political — were handled by the General *Yōgam*. The archdeacon and the representatives of all the Churches together with the priests formed such an assembly. About this Father Podipara writes:

"It was in these General-Church-Assemblies (the Malabar-Church-Yogam) that the Archdeacon, the Jathikkukarthavian (the one responsible for the Community), as he was popularly called, played his part in the most conspicuous way. The General-Church-Assemblies were practically supreme, and *de facto* no higher ecclesiastical authority questioned their decisions. The Thomas Christians, therefore, formed as it were, a Christian Republic with a head from among themselves. Their bishops who were foreigners were eclipsed by, or were under the shadow of, the Archdeacons. Such was the canonical set-up that had developed among the Thomas Christians of the past. Because of this "autonomous state" and "oneness" no foreign heresy or religious controversy had any impact on them, and they were quite content with their Archdeacons in preference to bishops from among themselves"¹⁵⁷.

6. Administration of Justice and Punishments

As mentioned above, the Thomas Christians had certain privileges in the administration of justice¹⁵⁸. The *yōgam* decided

¹⁵⁵ Cf. K. K. PILLA, *History of Kerala* (Mal.), p. 168; JOSE N. K., *Atima Kerala Sabha* (Mal.), p. 152.

¹⁵⁶ PAREMMAKKAL, *Varthmanappusthakam*, p. 41.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4: introduction by Podipara.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. PALAMATTAM, *Yogam in the Malabar Church*, pp. 118-122;

cases and even inflicted punishments. According to the gravity of the matter, the cases were reserved to the parish, regional and general assemblies; in the general assembly, the verdict of the archdeacon was more or less decisive. Sometimes the punishments amounted to 'excommunication'. The excommunicated could not receive the sacraments of confession and communion, would not be given *Casūri* or *Pax*¹⁵⁹; could not sit in the parish assembly; priests would not enter their houses, nor would bless their marriages, and would not take part in the *agape* feasts, (for example, *cāllam*) celebrated in their houses. They would be reinstated only after they had performed the penances imposed on them by the assembly. Before being absolved they had to stand at the door of the church and ask pardon. While absolving them the priest would slightly beat them with a bundle of sticks.¹⁶⁰

7. The Laity in the Church¹⁶¹

The great position of the laity in the Malabar Church is clear from the very system of the administration of the Church.

VAZHAPPILLY, *Penal Legislation in the Malabar Church*; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 153, 124 sq.

¹⁵⁹ *Kasuri* or *Kasturi* was a special Malabar custom of touching and kissing the hand of a priest, as a sign of respect by the faithful when he visits a family. After the recitation of Divine Office, all priests and other clerics of the church used to give *Kasuri* to the oldest priest: cf. SILVA REGO, *Documentacao*, XII, f. 402.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. PODIPARA, "Hindu in culture ..." in *STCE*, II, p. 109.

About punishments Dynisio gives the following description:

"The crimes against the state were punished by the king of each country; the crimes against the commandments of the Church were punished by the bishop, if they were grave; if not, by the cathenar and the parish council composed of the principal Christians of the place. The punishment usually consisted in paying some money to the church, and when the culprit refused to pay it, he was excommunicated, and the other Christians were asked not to communicate with him. When the offender was a cathenar, he was refused the *kasuri* in the church, and this meant that he was not admitted to the common prayer of the church. If the cathenar did not amend even after this, he was denied incense in the Liturgy at the time of the purification with the thurible, and if he still refused to correct his conduct he was excommunicated", SILVA REGO, *Documentacao*, XII, f. 402 sq; Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 153; GOUVEA, *Jornada*, f. 60 sq.

¹⁶¹ For details, Cf. THUDIAMPLACKAL, *The Laity in the Malabar*

Priests and honourable lay leaders alike constituted this administrative body. It had power to punish the offenders of the commandments of the Church. Lay representatives used to attend ecclesiastical conventions. The Synod of Angamaly in 1583 and the Synod of Diamper in 1599 are the best proofs for this¹⁶².

8. Evangelisation

Many authors have labelled the pre-sixteenth century Thomas Christians as not-missionary-minded Christians¹⁶³. But this statement shows the lack of a proper understanding of the historical vicissitudes of the Thomas Christians which did affect their missionary work adversely. All historians affirm that the caste superiority of these Christians was the stumbling block to proselytising¹⁶⁴. Then what about the period before the establishment of the caste system — say, the first millennium?

We have ample reasons to suppose that some missionary activities were not altogether absent during this first period, especially in the background of its contact with the Chaldean Church which was then known as “the Church on fire”¹⁶⁵. According to Bishop Francis Ros, the Northist Thomas Christians were eager to increase the membership of their Church and received into their community many pagans whom they baptised¹⁶⁶. Paremmakal in his controversy with the Carmelite missionaries in the 18th century, strongly asserted that the forefathers of the Thomas Christians were greatly missionary-minded¹⁶⁷.

The rigid caste system brought by the Aryan superiority at the end of the first millennium gave the Thomas Christians

Church, PUU, Rome, 1966. JOSE N. K., “The participation of the Laity in the Kerala Church” (Mal.) in *Historical Problems* pp. 144-164.

¹⁶² Cf. THALIATH, *Synod of Diamper*, p. 42.

¹⁶³ For details, Cf. PAUL THENAYAN, *The Missionary Consciousness of the St. Thomas Christians, A Historico-Pastoral study*, Viani Publications, Cochin, 1982, pp. 80-82.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. JOHN WEBSTER GRANT, *God's People in India*, The Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1959, p. 24; BROWN, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, p. 173.

¹⁶⁵ For details of the missionary endeavours of the Thomas Christians, cf. P. THENAYAN, op. cit. pp. 83-98.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 99.

¹⁶⁷ PAREMMAKKAL, *Varthamanappusthakam*, p. 263.

high position in the society. They became safe and secure within the strong walls of their noble caste. Thus they survived extermination which happened to Buddhism and Jainism in South India. Conversion from lower castes became detrimental to their nobility and existence. There was no objection to conversions from castes of the superior or equal status (Brahmins and Nairs). Proselytising became rare. Those converted from the low castes were segregated from the rest of the Christians. Vicissitudes and attitudes have now changed. Today the Syro-Malabar Church is one of the most energetic Churches in the field of evangelisation.

C. Liturgico-Religious Life

Every hypothesis from the tradition on the Apostolate of St. Thomas in India would lead us to conclude that the *Kristu Mārga* or Christian Way of Life brought by Thomas (*Tōma Mārga*) was adaptable to the local environment. According to this view, the shift over to the Chaldean form of worship took place only after the Chaldean colonisation with bishops. Historians are not unanimous about this period. Even after this colonisation, the Chaldean (East Syrian) rite was not imported in its entirety¹⁶⁸. Local rites, known often as the Indian customs and traditions of the Thomas Christians, prevailed on such occasions as birth, marriage and death. The rites of Baptism, Eucharist and Ordination were more in conformity with the Chaldean liturgy¹⁶⁹. Both the Chaldeans and the Thomas Christians shared many Eastern traits; they zealously preserved the 'Anaphora of Addai and Mari'; they kept with due veneration the *Pshita*, one of the oldest versions of the Old Testament, and so on. By the 15th century, the liturgy of the Thomas Christians became a Malabarised Chaldean liturgy.

1. The Churches

(i) *The Architecture*¹⁷⁰: The life of the Thomas Christians was always church-centred. As for the churches, the primitive

¹⁶⁸ PODIPARA, *Our Rite*, p. 31.

¹⁶⁹ Cf. JOSE N. K., *Historical Problems*, p. 120.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. ANDREW ATHAPPILLY, 'Kerala Church Architecture', in *STCE*, II, pp. 151-152; ID., 'Pre-Portuguese Kerala Church Art, in JOHN, *Christian Heritage of Kerala*, pp. 74-82. P. THOMAS, *Churches in India*, Publication Division, Govt. of India, New Delhi, 1981; M. K. DEVASSY, IAS., *The Sculpture and Painting Arts of the Kerala Christian Churches*, (Mal.), Puthenchira, Trichur, India, 1978; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 158-159.

Thomas Christian community might have followed the Buddhist *vihāras* or pagodas. They were simple constructions with leaves of trees; they were the centre of *Manṛam*. The pali word *palli*, which was originally used by Buddhists to denote their *vihāra* is still in use among the Christians to denote their churches¹⁷¹. The use of wood for temple, church and house constructions became common only after the fourth century¹⁷². After the establishment of Aryan superiority, Christian churches were modelled after Hindu temples with adaptations from Chaldean Church architecture. Monserrate wrote in the 16th century: "Their (of Thomas Christians) churches, of which there are still many, were built in the same manner as the houses of the idols of these parts; the present Archbishop (Mar Abraham) sees to it that they are built in our style"¹⁷³.

The churches were rectangular buildings divided into three sections, namely, sanctuary, nave and porch corresponding to the *Garbha-grha*, *Maṇṭapa* and *Mukhamanṭapa* of the Hindu temples. The inside of the church had more similarities with the Chaldean church constructions. The sanctuary (*Madubhaha*) was always towards the east; it was higher than the nave both with regard to the floor and the roof, and was separated by a door and a veil. In some churches there were niches on the walls of the sanctuary near the altar¹⁷⁴. The nave was divided from west to east in successive sections for women, men and choir; the section of the choir (*Kestrōma*) was a little higher than the other parts of the nave called *Haikkala*. There was a big door on the western side and small ones on the side. The floor of the church used to be painted with cow-dung. For Christmas and Easter the floor used to be strewn with the leaves of the aromatic plant *eṭana*. Often water was served at the entrance of the church to wash the feet of the faithful¹⁷⁵. There used to be a bronze oil

171 Cf. K. K. PILLA, *History of Kerala*, (Mal.), I, p. 908; SREEDHARAMENON, *History of Kerala* (Mal.), NBS, Kottayam, 1967, p. 127; JOSE N. K., *Atima Kerala Sabha* (Mal.), p. 11.

172 Cf. K. K. PILLA, *op. cit.*, p. 908.

173 Cited in MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 159.

174 Cf. PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians* p. 86; P. THENAYAN, *op. cit.*, (note 163), p. 31.

175 This custom resembles the Hindu custom of washing before entering the Hindu temples. Like Hindus, the Christians used to take bath and put on clean clothes before going to the church. Entering the church they prostrated themselves and kissed the floor. Cf. KOLLAPARAMBIL, *Revolution*, p. 7.

lamp (*Nilavilakku*) at the centre of the church. Every church had a copy of the Bible adorned with gold or silver and precious stones. It was rarely taken out of the sanctuary and that was for processions.

The pre-Portuguese architecture can still be seen in some churches today; for example, the churches of Kallupara, Kayamkulam and Kundara. Some other features of the old christian churches are given under the following headings.

ii) *Ayudhappura*: The porch in front of the church was reserved for keeping arms of men during religious services. The attached aisle was often called *āyudhappura* (house of arms). The Thomas Christians used to wear arms; but when they entered the church they had to take them away.

iii) *Statues and Images*: There is controversy among scholars about the use of statues and images among the Thomas Christians during the pre-Portuguese period. Mundadan writes: "All are agreed as to the fact that in the church there were no images but only cross"¹⁷⁶. A good number of historians support this stand. They quote the reports of Joseph the Indian (1502) and of Penteado (1516/1518) to have this¹⁷⁷.

There are also evidences for the contrary statement, although the use of images and statues was restricted, and in some places altogether banned because of the Chaldean influence. The report about the meeting of Vasco de Gama with the Christians of Crangannore at Cochin in 1502 gives testimony to the existence of statues (statue of St. Mary) which the Thomas Christians venerated¹⁷⁸. Mundadan himself quotes Barros (1777/78) who got information from a Thomas Christian student in Portugal that the Church at Quilon had in the past the statue of our Lady at the tomb of the king Sibyl¹⁷⁹. The 29th decree of the session viii of the Synod of Diamper positively mentions

¹⁷⁶ Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 158.

¹⁷⁷ *Paesi*, p. 156; SILVA REGO, *Documentacao*, III, f. 545 : Writings of Penteado.

¹⁷⁸ MANUEL DE FARIA Y SOUSA, *Asia Portuguesa*, translated by JOHN STEVANS, T. I., London, 1695, p. 46; cited in PANJIKKARAN, *The Syrian Church in Malabar*, p. 38; A. ATHAPPILLY, "Pre-Portuguese Church Art", in JOHN, *Christian Heritage of Kerala*, p. 77.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 109.

the existence of images and statues in Malabar for a long time¹⁸⁰. In the past there used to be also pictures (paintings) of pea-cocks and mermen on the walls of the churches¹⁸¹.

The Buddhist and Jainist culture, which was prevalent in South India during the early Christian centuries, had developed the art of sculpture and inscriptions¹⁸². The Buddhist art of sculpture was taken over by the Hindus for their temple arts¹⁸³. It was likely that the Christians also imitated this art for their churches. The existence of an ancient granite statue of St. Thomas at Mylapore church which, according to scholars, is not later than the seventh century^{184a}, strengthens this belief. The Italian Franciscan missionary Blessed Oderic of Pordenone, who visited Malabar and Mylapore around 1324/25, speaks of the Church of St. Thomas decorated with many idols and statues^{184b}. The Statues of St. Peter and St. Paul kept outside the main old church unit at Chengannoor (Kerala) are probably Christian imitations of the *Dvārapālakas* (Door Keepers) of Hindu temples. The granite Crosses with inscriptions of Alangad, Kadamattam, Kottayam and Mylapore; the baptismal fonts of Edappally, Kanjoor and Kaduthuruthy, etc., are examples of this artistic influence mentioned above¹⁸⁵.

180 Cf. SCARIA ZACHARIA, *Rantu Kritikal*, p. 84.

181 Cf. A. ATHAPPILLY, "Pre-Portuguese . . .", in JOHN, *Christian Heritage of Kerala*, pp. 74-82.

182 Cf. R. PANDEY, *Historical and Literary Inscriptions* (The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Studies), vol. 23, Varnasi, 1962, pp. 4-44; J. BLOCH, *Les inscriptions d'Asoka*, Collection Emile Senart, Paris, 1950; L. DE LA VALLEE POUSSEIN, *L'Inde aux temps des Mauryas et des Barbares Grecs, Scythes, Parthes et Yue-tchi*, (Histoire du Monde, 6, Paris, 1930), pp. 120-154; E. LAMOTTE, *Histoire du buddhisme indien*, (Bibliothèque du Museon 43), Repr. Louvain, 1967, pp. 319-387.

The important inscriptions are those of Emperor Asoka, which are also found in South India. Among these inscriptions there is mention of *Keralaputra* (Kerala). The Buddhist sculptures of Amaravathi (Andhra, S. India) are pre-Christian.

183 SREEDHARAMENON, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, p. 13.

184a Cf. B. A. FIGREDO, "Ancient Statue of St. Thomas", in *STCE*, II, p. 18.

184b Cf. MEDLYCOTT, *India and the Apostle Thomas*, pp. 95-96. Cf. Ferroli, *Jesuits*, II, pp. 65-66

185 Cf. JAMES MENACHERRY, "Thomas Christian Architecture", in *STCE*, II pp. 137-151; M. R. RAGHAVA VARIER, "Christianity from Kerala Inscriptions" in JOHN, *Christian Heritage of Kerala*, pp. 48-56.

It is a proven fact that the Chaldeans were intolerant of statues and images¹⁸⁶. The Chaldean prelates who governed the Thomas Christians tried to abolish the use of statues and images in India. The words of the Thomas Christians to Penteado in 1516/18 that "St. Thomas had forbidden them to have images" echo such instructions of the Chaldean prelates¹⁸⁷. The niches on the walls of the sanctuary near the altar in some old churches of Malabar indicate that statues were once placed there, but were taken away after the Chaldean prohibition.

iv) *Crosses*: The Thomas Christians had great devotion towards the Cross. Their churches were distinguished from the Hindu temples by the Cross at the top of the building and by the Cross at the altar. A big granite Cross was also erected in front of the church¹⁸⁸. Going around the Cross in front of the Church was always a part of the church processions. The ancient Persian Crosses with Palhavi inscriptions, mentioned above, are famous.

v) *Baptismal Fonts*: Near the sanctuary was the baptismal font. It was usually made of huge granite stone and often exquisitely carved with Indian and Persian artistic genius; the baptismal font of Edappally is an excellent example for this.

vi) *The Church Precincts*: Like the Hindu temples, the churches too had laterite or granite compound wall. It had a gate-way (*Paṭippura*); on the side of it was built a *Koṭṭupura* or music hall, where even the Hindu caste of Pāṇans performed their musical arts to honour the Christians¹⁸⁹. There were also *ūṭṭupuras* or buildings used for serving food to pilgrims

¹⁸⁶ The East Syrians (both Chaldeans and Nestorians), because of their semetic mentality and Jewish influence, never tolerated statues and images: Cf. ATIYA AZIZ, S., *A History of Eastern Christianity*, London, 1968, p. 297.

¹⁸⁷ SILVA REGO, *Documentacao*, III, P. 545; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 159.

¹⁸⁸ Like the Hindus, there might have been probably *Dipa Stampa* (Big granite pillar with wick-holders all around for oil lamps) in front of the church. Later it developed into such granite open-air cross called *Kurisuṭṭi*. The crosses in front of the churches of Niranam and Kuravilangad will substantiate this theory.

¹⁸⁹ *Paṭippura* is still preserved in the Arthatt and Kunnamkulam churches. Kuravilangad church has still the *Koṭṭupura*.

and worshippers on special days and during the festivals of the church. On the western side of the precinct, there used to be a flag-staff (*Koṭimara*) to bear flags at their tops indicating a feast. Many ancient churches had *Dīpastampa* or granite oil lamps¹⁹⁰. Pools or wells, for washing feet before entering the church had also belonged to the church precincts.

2. Liturgy

From very ancient times the Thomas Christians have shared the East Syrian rite with the Chaldean Church¹⁹¹. It is an open question if there was an indigenous liturgy before proper relations with the Chaldean Church were established¹⁹².

As far as we can trace back, the language of the liturgy of the Thomas Christians was East Syriac and they gloried in it¹⁹³. Still, we cannot reject the possibility (for some the probability) of the first liturgy being adapted to the cultural environment of India and being in the proto-Malayalam or the ancient Tamil (Dravidian) language of the time¹⁹⁴. Joseph

¹⁹⁰ See above, note 188.

¹⁹¹ Cf. CCO, *Fonti*, II, VIII (Syro-Malankara), p. 13; GIAMIL, *Genuinae Relationes*, pp. 564 sq.

¹⁹² Although some Jews were living in Malabar at the time of the Apostle Thomas, his apostolate is closely connected in tradition with the conversion of the local people. This has given rise to the hypothesis of the existence of a liturgical rite making adaptations from the Indian culture and language during and after the apostolic times. Cf. J. THALIATH, "The Syro-Malabar Liturgy and Liturgical Renewal", *STAR* (St. Thomas Academy for Research, Documentation), November, 1980, 1, Alwaye, p. 6.

¹⁹³ Cf. KOODAPUZHA, *Indian Church History*, pp. 105-107.

¹⁹⁴ We may note here that the Proto-Malayalam or ancient Tamil language had variations according to different *Manrams* or communities. In the Jewish or Chaldean colonies their language might have prevailed. About the liturgical language, C. J. George Cathanar writes:

"we are not certain as to the language of the liturgy he (St. Thomas) introduced into India. It is however probable that he had introduced it in the principal languages of India, as the other Apostles did wherever they preached in the vernacular of the country. For example, St. Peter, first brought it to Jerusalem in Syriac, to Antioch in Greek, and to Rome in Greek or in Latin; St. John brought it in Greek to Ephesus, St. Thadæus in Armenian to Armenia, St. Mathew in Aethiopic to Aethiopia, and those who preached in Palestine introduced it in Syriac, such as SS. James Major and Minor and St. Thomas himself in Chaldea and Persia & c."

The Orthodoxy of the St. Thomas Christians, Kottayam, 1904, p. 57.

A. Jungmann gives the common trend of the early liturgy in the following words: "It was more or less a matter of course that in the divine services the language employed should be the language prevailing in the locality concerned, especially if it was a language of culture with a literature"¹⁹⁵.

Although the Thomas Christians shared the East Syrian Rite with the Chaldeans, they gave it a local colour. Placid Podipara writes:

"The prayers and formulas for all these acts of worship were those of the East Syrian Church of Mesopotamia and Persia, and they were in Syriac... But the contexts in which they were used were all Indianised or Malabarised, with new Indo-Malabar Christianised rites added to them as "Sacramentals"¹⁹⁶.

A brief survey of the sacraments and sacramentals are given below¹⁹⁷.

3. Divine Office

All the clergy (*Kattanārs* and *Cemmasās*) of the Thomas Christian parish used to recite the Divine Office daily in choir in the church. As far as we know the text of the Divine Office was according to the Chaldean liturgical discipline. The Thomas Christian priests did not consider the recitation a grave obligation; for, if they were absent from the choir, they were not reciting it at home. Nevertheless, all were keen on reciting it. They recited the Office three times a day (*Ramša*, *Lelia* and *Supra*). The faithful also often participated in the Divine Office and responded with "Halleluias". On Saturday evening and Sunday morning all participated; on other days, some. During the celebration of the Divine Office, the Portuguese missionaries in the 16th century noticed certain ceremonies peculiar to the Malabarians, such as, giving peace or *Kasūri*, prostrations, and signing of the cross from right to left¹⁹⁸.

¹⁹⁵ J. A. JUNGSMANN, *The Early Liturgy*, London, 1958; Repr. 1980, p. 125.

¹⁹⁶ PODIPARA, "The Thomas Christians and Adaptation", in the *Eastern Church Review*. Last number, 1970, cited in *STCE*, II, p. 189.

¹⁹⁷ About Sacraments in General, Cf. J. HILARION, "The Sacraments of the Malabar Church before 1400 A.D.", in *STCE*, II, pp. 114-117.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. PUTHIYAKUNNEL, *Syro-Malabar Clergy*, pp. 139-140; for details, *Ibid.*, pp. 120-160; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 161-163.

4. Rites after Birth

(i) *Indian Rites*: Many Hindu, mainly Brahmin, customs in connection with birth, marriage and death, were Christianised by the Thomas Christians¹⁹⁹. Corresponding to the *Jātakaraṇam* of the Brahmins, the father of every Thomas Christian child used to mix a little honey, ghee and gold and put this mixture into its mouth 36 hours after its birth. The words *Mārān Išo M'siha* (Our Lord Jesus Christ) and the child's name were whispered into its ear (*Nāmakaraṇa*). A black thread, often ornamented with panther toe-nails (*Pulinakham*) and mangoose teeth (*Kirippallu*), was tied around the waist of the child on the 28th day; such ornaments were superstitious amulets. After delivery mothers used to enter the church only after 40 days if the child was a boy and after 80 days if the child was a girl. *Pūṇūl* or sacred thread, similar to that worn by Brahmins, was blessed at the baptism of a male child and was put on it, and was removed when the boy attained boyhood. Six months after the birth, the rite of *Annapraśnam* or feeding the child with boiled rice was observed. The ceremony known as *Ariyiliruttu*, or writing with finger the letters of the alphabet in rice, was performed when the child first went to school.

ii) *Baptism*: Children were generally baptised on or after the 40th day after birth according to the East-Syrian formula²⁰⁰. They were given biblical names with modifications suited to Malabar tastes, in particular, those of the paternal and maternal grandparents for the first and second child respectively. On this occasion people used to offer money to priests and to the Church. Adult baptisms were not unheard of. Sometimes, the Chaldean Prelates reserved baptisms to themselves²⁰¹. Aloysius Cadamust who visited Malabar in 1493 says that those who were in Calicut were baptised in a river; owing to the scarcity of priests, baptism was administered only once in a year²⁰².

199 CHERUKARAKUNNEL, *The Adapted Social Customs*; ID., 'Indianisation among the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala', in *STCE*, II, pp. 174-177; Cf. also, *STCE*, II, pp. 111, 126-130.

200 Cf. KANIAPURAM, *The East Syrian Baptism*, PIOS, Rome, 1971; PODIPARA, *Our Rite* pp. 35-36.

201 Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 168-172.

202 Cf. RAULIN, *Historia Malabaricae*, p. 385.

iii) *Confirmation*: The sacrament of Confirmation was administered along with baptism without any special anointing. The most important part of this sacrament of fulfilment (*Rāsa d' Sūmlāya*) was the imposition of hands together with the prescribed prayers. According to one opinion among scholars, coconut oil was used for the baptismal or post-baptismal unctioning. Some of the early Portuguese missionaries doubted the existence of this sacrament; a few of the local clergy did not even understand the distinction between baptism and confirmation because of their ignorance.²⁰³

5. Eucharistic Celebration²⁰⁴

The Thomas Christians had the greatest respect for and devotion towards the Eucharist. The Divine Liturgy, which they called *Qurbāna* (= Offering), was celebrated with great solemnity; but the celebration was not very frequent. From very ancient times they shared the East Syrian Divine Liturgy with the Chaldeans. Sometimes it was also called "The Mass of the Apostles." Probably there were three anaphoras in use. We have more evidence about the use of the anaphora of Addai and Mari than that of Theodor and of Nestor.

The Bread for the Eucharistic celebration, as a rule, was leavened. It was generally baked with salt and oil by the clerics studying for priesthood. During the preparation they used to recite psalms. In some places lotus leaf was preferred to all other leaves to bring the bread to the altar during the offertory. They made wine out of raisins soaked in water.²⁰⁵ Chalice used to be adorned with small bells suspended around the brim. The liturgical dress was cope or a large piece of cloth

²⁰³ TISSERANT, *Eastern Christianity*, pp. 51-52; J. HILARION, op. cit., *STCE*, II, p. 115.

²⁰⁴ Cf. J. VELLIAN, "Syro-Malabar Liturgy through the Centuries", (Malayalam), Kottayam, February, 1967; ID., *Commentary on the Syro-Malabar Holy Mass* (Malayalam), Kottayam, November, 1968.

²⁰⁵ The Portuguese missionaries Monserrate (*ARSI Goa-Mal.*, vol. 33, f. 149) and Soledade (*Historia Seraphica da Ordem dos Padres S. Francisco na provincia de Portugal*, Lisboa, 1775, p. 916) say that 'rice cakes and wine of palm' were used as the matter of the Eucharistic sacrifice. Podipara doubts the truth of the statement. Probably the foreigners had mistaken the *nerca appam* or votive offering of rice bread and coconut juice distributed among devotees for the bread and wine used for the Holy Mass. Cf. *STCE*, II, pp. 115-116.

in the form of an amice and over it they wore a stole which they called *orario*. The celebrant invariably said Mass with two ministers. For solemn occasions — both for the living and for the dead — they had the solemn form of High Mass called *Rāsa* with the participation of five priests. Even for the ordinary Mass they used incense. Rarely there used to be preaching after the Gospel; but many priests were simply narrating stories and the people were eager to hear them. The creed used was Nicean. There was only one elevation (only of bread and not of wine) at which the faithful used to rise up and bend their heads to the floor saying that they were not worthy of seeing it. The bread was divided into many parts and with one of the particles, after dipping it into the chalice, the other particles too were made wet. Communion was given in hands and in both species. The Eucharistic fast had to be observed from the previous midnight. After Communion they would not sleep during day time, nor spit except after having tasted some food or drink. The priests would not speak to the non-Christians for hours before the Mass; they would even avoid travelling on vehicles driven by the non-Christians.

6. Sacrament of Penance

According to the report of Joseph the Indian, the Thomas Christians practised the sacrament of penance.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, they did not have a developed system of private (auricular) confession like the Latins. Public sinners were subject to penalty which was remitted by the assembly (*yōgam*) of the parishioners headed by priests.

7. Rites for Marriage²⁰⁷

The marriage ceremonies of the Thomas Christians were indicative of their identity. For marriage they displayed their privileges and noble status more than on any other occasion.

²⁰⁶ *Paesi*, p. 329 On the sacrament of confession, Cf. MOONNANA-PALLIL, *Legislation on Confession in Malabar Church*, PIOS, Rome, 1968: Cf. also, *STCE*, II, p. 116; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 172-173.

²⁰⁷ For details, Cf. NAGAROOR, *Matrimonial legislation in the Malabar Church*, PIOS, ROME, 1971; THATTIL, *Proposal for a reformed Rite of Matrimony for the Syro-Malabar Church*, PIOS, ROME, 1972; P. J. THOMAS, *Marriage Customs*; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 174-176.

Some of the marriage customs are preserved even today. The Southists are more conservative regarding this.

i) *Engagement and other arrangements*: Child marriage was in vogue among the Thomas Christians. The marriages were generally arranged ones; the maternal uncles had a great part to play in this. There were no inter-marriage between the Northists and Southists. Information is lacking about the prohibited degrees of marriage, although the Portuguese missionaries said that the norms of the Thomas Christians were very elastic in comparison with the Latin norms.²⁰⁸

Unlike the Chaldeans, all the Thomas Christians followed the Brahmin custom of dowry given by the party of the bride to the bridegroom. It was given, on the day of engagement at the house of the bride and often in the form of ornaments. A certain percentage (generally 10%) of the dowry went to the parish Church of the bride. This kind of tithe was called *Pasāram*.

After the exchange of the contract with regard to dowry, the marriage consent was given by the parties, often at the Church in the presence of a priest. Proclamations of banns became common only after the arrival of the Portuguese.

ii) *Marriage Day Preparations*: The marriage was usually on Sundays; but the celebrations lasted four days. A pavilion or pandal would be erected and elegantly decorated in front of the house. There would be also elaborate designs inside made by sprinkling rice flour (*Kalamezhuttu*). The relatives and friends used to come on the eve, on which night there would be different functions at the houses of both parties. The ceremonial hair-dressing (*Antam cār̥tu*) of the bridegroom, anointing the feet of the bride with *mayilānchi* (Henna *Lawhomia Alba*), ceremonial bath, feeding the bride and groom with sweets (*Madhuram Koṭṭukkal*), etc., had to be gone through. Songs commemorating the origin and privileges of the Christians were sung during all these functions.

²⁰⁸ Monserratte writes that marriages were sometimes conducted "in the same degree of Abraham and Sara", (i. e. between half-brother and sister: Genesis 20:12): Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 175.

On Sunday morning, after getting the blessing of the *Aṣān* or teacher, the parties dressed in royal garments, went to the church. The sister of the bridegroom used to take the *tāli* (a small medallion with a cross of 21 minute heads, which the groom had to tie around the neck of the bride with a thread taken from the bridal veil, signifying the marriage bond), *manṭrakōṭi* (bridal veil) and a special kind of bread prepared with *Aiyini* fruit. All except the bride and the groom used to dress themselves in white.

iii) *Church Functions*²⁰⁹: The most important function of marriage was the tying of the *tāli* or *minnu*, blessed by the priest, by the bridegroom round the neck of the bride. Married women (except widows) would never take off the *tāli* from their necks. At their death it would be either buried with them, or deposited in the treasury of the church. No wedding ring, which the East Syrian Rite prescribed, was used. The bridal veil, also blessed by the priest, was put on the head of the bride by the groom.

iv) *Processions*: The wedding processions to and from the church were royal. For this occasion, the Thomas Christians made use of the high privileges of using palanquin (*Antōlam*), elephants to ride on (*Ambāri*), royal silk umbrellas (*Muttukkuṭa*), day lamps (*Pakalvilakku*), walking clothes (*Pāvāṭa*), band (*Panja Vāḍyam*), people for shouting (*Naṭavili* by men and *Kurava* by women), body guards, fore-runners to clear the way, carpets, ornaments, slaves and many others.

v) *Rites at Home*: The reception for the newly wedded was at the residence of the bridegroom in the southern side of Kerala; but it was at the residence of the bride in the northern part. Here is a description of the ceremonies:

“The marriage party approaching the bride’s residence (bridegroom’s residence in the South) is accosted by the

²⁰⁹ According to Gouvea, some unholy practices prevailed among the Thomas Christians. “As for the matrimony, some called upon any priest who happened to be present, and many married themselves, especially those who dwelt in forests, merely by passing a thread from the neck of the groom to that of the bride, without any ecclesiastical ceremony or any prayer with that intention”: cited in SCARIA ZACHARIA, *Social customs*, p. 86. It seems that Gouvea generalises isolated events.

bride's (bridegroom's) mother in the traditional Kerala style with a bell metal lamp with a metallic handle and a bushel heaped up with grain. The couple stand facing the exit and are welcomed with sprinkling of *Nellum Nīrum*, a fertility cum coronation rite. As they are escorted into the pavilion, the couple take special care to place the right foot first. Enthroned in the midst of silk bridal attire are offered sweets *madhuraṁ koṭukkal*. The chief guests, seated on white cloth with black rugs underneath, apply sandal paste and inhale the rich odours of musk and camphor. As the party enjoy chewing-pan a 'Paṇan' or 'Vīraṭṭiyan' comes in singing the privileges of the 'Syrian' Christians. The couple going thrice round a lamp and the elders joyously blessing them culminate the wedding ceremony. The party is then treated with a sumptuous feast served on folded leaf (symbolic of the royal way of eating out of double leaf)".²¹⁰

The following days were also ceremonial. Every function was accompanied with songs. Dances called *Mārgam kali*, *Aṭṭam* and *Vaṭṭamkali* were also performed. Podipara gives the following description:

"The ceremony of "shutting and opening the bridal chamber" prescribed in the East Syrian Rite (in Malayalam it is called *adaccuthura*) seems to have been substituted by songs and solemn bath of the bridegroom who came out of his apartment at the invitation of his mother-in-law. But he would not come out until after she had promised (in songs) to give him bronze vessels with a cow and calf. This promise would be fulfilled after the birth of the first child which took place in the paternal house of the girl".²¹¹

Although marriage was often before the age of puberty, marital life could be started only after they were sufficiently grown up. Even though they lived in the midst of non-Christians, divorce as such was unheard of among them. Widows would not marry except after the period of mourning for one year.

²¹⁰ J. KOLENGADAN, "Culture and traditions of Thomas Christians", in *STCE*, II, pp. 129-130. The leaf is that of plantain or banana tree.

²¹¹ PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, pp. 90-91.

8. Rites for the Dying and the Dead²¹²

i) *Anointing the sick*: No pre-sixteenth century document is available to show the existence of the sacrament of the sick in Malabar, as was practised in the West. But priests used to bless the sick, to read the Gospel over them and to place upon their bodies pieces of palm leaf or paper on which were written verses from the Bible.²¹³ Moreover, earth taken from the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore was mixed with water (considered as Holy Water) and was given to the sick to drink.

ii) *Death and Burial*: When signs of death appeared, the dying person was laid on a bed facing the East according to the local custom. People around used to chant prayers. As soon as the person breathed his last, his toes and thumbs were tied with a piece of cloth. A few hours after the death, the corpse was anointed and taken to be washed in warm water. Next, the body was laid in state in a prominent place of the house, the head being towards the East.

Documents are not clear about the funeral services of the Thomas Christians. Only Mar Jacob's time (XVI C.) saw the beginning of common cemeteries in the churchyards. Previously, it is asserted, they used to bury their dead in their own premises.²¹⁴ We may suppose that the priests, who could attend the burial, made use of the East Syrian Ritual.

iii) *Paṭṭiṇikañṇi* (Repast): Till after the burial was over, no food could be prepared or eaten in the house of the dead. As soon as the priest came after burial, he would be given tender coconut (*karikku*) to drink. After drinking a little of the coconut water, the priest gave it to be tasted by the near relatives of the deceased. Afterwards, the priest would recite the liturgical prayers for the occasion (*Annīda* at the house) and would bless *jīrakam* (cumin seed). Then all people one after

²¹² Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 173-174; STCE, II, pp. 111, 116, 127, 130, 175.

²¹³ Perhaps this was done as an imitation of the Hindu practice of wearing on the body palm leaf in which some spirit invoking *mantram* was written.

²¹⁴ WICKI, *Documenta Indica*, XI, p. 140; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, p. 174.

another would come and accept the 'peace' (*Kasūri*) from the extended hand of the priest and take a few seeds of *jīrakam* to eat. Thus they break the fast after burial. There would be meals, purely vegetarian, to commemorate the dead. The poor would be given food, clothes and money.

iv) *Mourning and other functions*: The relatives and friends of the deceased used to pray and eat together at the house of the dead for eight days. Certain classes of people, who depended on the departed, would bewail his death in songs for a certain number of days, and they would be paid for this. If the dead person had not made a testament, the friends and relatives thus assembled would arrange for the proper inheritance of his property by the nearest relative. The wife got back her dowry and was free to go back to her house and get married after the lapse of one year. If she married before, by law and custom, she would loose the dowry. After a death in a house, one young man of the family would grow beard (*dīkṣa*) for one year.

v) *Pulakuli*: Like high caste Hindus, the Thomas Christians also practised *Pulakuli* or ritual bath, on the 11th day after the burial, for the purification from the defilement due to the death of a member of the family.

vi) *Cāttam* or *Srādhm*: Subsequent to *Pulakuli* there were also celebrations in observance of the 17th, 28th and 41st days. The death anniversary celebration was called *cāttam* or *srādhm*. Parents would not celebrate the *cāttam* of their deceased children. Liturgical prayers, commemorial common meals, almsgiving, etc., were parts of this celebration. The *Kallanārs* and *Cemmāśas* officiated at the functions at home. Some of these customs are preserved even today.

9. The Feasts²¹⁵

The pre-sixteenth century Thomas Christians generally followed the Chaldean calendar on feasts, adapted, modelled and updated to the local needs and traditions.

²¹⁵ Cf. NEELANKAVIL, *Feast Discipline of the St. Thomas Christians*, PUL, Rome, 1968; ID., 'Feasts of the Thomas Christians', in *STCE*, II, pp. 112-114; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, pp. 93-94; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 176-178.

i) *Holy Week*: The Holy Week was celebrated in a special way by keeping vigils, by almsgiving and by reciting long prayers. On Maundy Thursday there was the custom of breaking an unleavened bread marked with a sign of the cross by the head of the family. No non-Christian can have a share in it. On Good Friday, as a sign of sorrow, not even the floor of the house would be swept clean. They used to take some bitter drinks or bitter leaves. From Maundy Thursday night till next Saturday, complete silence was observed and many would keep complete fasting. The Pasch of Resurrection and the following two days were celebrated with greatest solemnity.

ii) *Feasts of St. Thomas*: The feasts of St. Thomas were all dear to the Thomas Christians. The octave of Easter, which they called "New Sunday", was solemnly celebrated in honour of St. Thomas who put his hands in the side and wounds of Christ and confessed with conviction "My Lord and My God." Pilgrimage to Malayattoor, where St. Thomas is believed to have prayed, is even today made by many Christians on the occasion. The feast of St. Thomas on the 3rd of July has been always called *Dukhrāna* or Commemoration. Even in the 20th century, certain families used to keep it as a day of *cāttam* in memory of their father of faith, St. Thomas. According to the testimony of Correa Amander, a Portuguese Jesuit, in a letter on 20 January 1564, the Thomas Christians also celebrated a particular feast on 21 November to commemorate the arrival of St. Thomas on the Malabar coast.^{216a} People used to make pilgrimages to Malyamkara (Crangannore) and Mylapore during this season.^{216b}

iii) *Christmas and Epiphany*: On Christmas night people used to bless a bonfire of dry wood and to go around it in procession. There used to be only the night Mass for Christmas.

Among the important feasts was Epiphany. It was called *rākkuli* (night bath) in South Kerala, where according to custom

^{216a} SILVA REGO, *Documentacao*, vol. IX, f. 298 sq; P. J. THOMAS, *The Christian Literature of Kerala*, p. 56.

^{216b} About the pilgrimages to Mylapore, Crangannore, Quilon and Pallipport, Cf. WICKI, *Documenta Indica*, V, p. 186, VI, pp. 91-92, 178-180; BELTRAMI, *Chiesa Caldea*, p. 261; THEKKEDATH, *History of Christianity in India*, II, pp. 27-28.

the Thomas Christians bathed at night in rivers in memory of Our Lord's baptism. In North Kerala it was called *Piṇṭikutti perunāl*, when feast torches were lighted (usually on *Piṇṭi* or plantain trunk) during night. People used to go round them thrice crying out in Syriac *el paiya* (God is bright), referring to the manifestation of Our Lord.

iv) *Other Important Feasts*: Besides Sundays, the important feasts were: Pentecost, the Ascension of Our Lord, All Apostles, the Exaltation of the Cross, the Transfiguration of Our Lord, the Assumption of Our Lady, the Nativity of Our Lady, St. John Baptist, SS. Peter and Paul, and St. George.

v) *Particular Feasts*: The feasts of the patron saints of the Church were celebrated with great solemnity by the Thomas Christians. Besides these, two feasts were celebrated in honour of St. Hormisdas, the Abbot (one on the 1st of September and the other on Monday of the third week of Easter). The feast of Mar *Sapōr* and Mar *Prōt*, who were known as the *Quadiṣangal* (saints), was on May 19. On the fifth of July was the feast of *Quirce* which, according to Bishop Ros, was St. Cyriac, a child martyr.

vi) *The Celebration*: The Thomas Christians counted the day from sunset to sunset. Therefore the feast was begun on the eve with solemn Vespers and other prayers. Eucharistic liturgy was an important part of the celebration; offerings (*nērcā*) and processions were also integral parts. During the feast day they abstained from work.

vii) *Nērcā (Offerings)*: In connection with the feasts and festivals of the church, devotees used to make *nērcā*. *Sadya* or *agape* services, offerings of edibles and other objects and *noimbu* (fasts and other acts of penance) formed the important part of such *nērcas*²¹⁷. For the *agape* feasts priests used to sit in the

²¹⁷ SREEDHARA MENON, *Cultural Heritage of Kerala*, pp. 56–57.

The important forms of *nerca* other than *Sadya* — some of which are still in practice — were : *Paccor nerca* (offering of rice boiled with coconut juice., eg. at Mannarkad), *Palpayasam* (milk pudding. eg. at Chembakassery), *Tamuku nerca* (edible sweets prepared of rice flour and plantains, eg. at Alangad), *urul nerca* (crawling on knees eg. at Arthungal), *nintu nerca* (walking

sanctuary and the lay people in the nave. In big churches the *ūttupura* was used for that purpose.

10. The Fasts

The Thomas Christians had a rigorous discipline with regard to fasts and abstinence²¹⁸. Besides the fasts of Advent, Lent and the Fridays, they practised such fasts as, the 14 days' fast before the Assumption of Our Lady, and the three days' fast of Ninivites or Jonas the Prophet (*Mūnnunōmbu*). They, especially their women, observed seven days' fast in honour of Our Lady from the first of September. According to Dionysio, a Portuguese Jesuit missionary in Malabar, the fasts of Lent and the Vigils of Christmas, Pentecost, Ascension, Assumption of Our Lady, St. Hermisdas and some other saints of their Church were obligatory²¹⁹. Similarly they fasted on the eve of the feast of Transfiguration²²⁰. They kept abstinence from meat, fish, eggs, milk products, etc., on the days of fast, on Wednesdays and on Fridays. Fasting was holy; it had to begin with a bath; no non-Christian could be touched; conjugal acts were to be avoided; finally, much time was to be spent in prayer. Although no mortal sin was attached to the omission, they observed their fast rigorously.

IV. Conclusion

To find out the true nature of a Church one must enquire into the original identity of that Church. With this purpose in mind we have looked back into the early juridical history of

on four legs), *urakkamozhikkal* (remaining awake at night, eg. at Mulavukad), offerings of fowl (eg. St. George Shrine, Edappally), offerings of silver and gold models of crosses, snakes, human eyes, ears, legs, etc.

Many scrupulous beliefs were attached to the performance of *nercas*. They feared disaster in their omissions. Cf. THEKKEDATH, *History of Christianity in India*, II, p. 89.

The many varieties of *nerca* resemble the *vazhipatu* offerings at Hindu temples. Whether they were adaptations from Hindus or *vice versa* require deeper study; there is probability for both.

²¹⁸ Cf. THURUTHIMATTAM, *Fasting Discipline of the Malabar Church*. PUL, Rome, 1965; MUNDADAN, *Traditions*, pp. 178-179; PODIPARA, *Thomas Christians*, p. 93.

²¹⁹ Cf. SILVA REGO, *Documentacao*, XII, p. 401.

²²⁰ Cf. MUNDADAN, *Traditions*. p. 179.

the Apostolic, Indian Church of the Thomas Christians, who had the 'See of Thomas' and the 'Law of Thomas' as their patrimony. We have sought to bring out the 'identity and individuality' of this Church, which in the course of time grew in the relationship with the Chaldean Church.

The descriptions given in this work indicate that the Thomas Christians had evolved a canon law adapted to their circumstances. It was called the 'Law of Thomas', their particular law. It regulated all spheres of their life – social, political and religious. When the existing usages and practices were found to be inadequate to their ever growing needs, they sought norms from the similar churches and communities. This was a matter of adaptation and enrichment. Vestiges of the Hindu customs and Chaldean discipline still found in the discipline of the Syro-Malabar Church are due to such adaptation in the process of the growth of the 'Law of Thomas'.

After the 16th century the Indian Church of the Thomas Christians came under different Latin jurisdictions. Latin law was made to prevail on the Law of Thomas. Many Latin missionaries judged the Chaldean elements in the Law of Thomas to be heretical and the Indian customs and traditions to be superstitious.

In the 20th century attempts are going on under the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy to revive the Church of the Christians of St. Thomas. In order to keep up its identity and individuality the Law of Thomas has to be made incarnate in the existential situation. Such a process has two-fold phases: restoration and adaptation. It is hoped that the present work will be helpful in this process.

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